

# ARABIA **FOOD**

*and*

# **T R A V E L**

**Paul Bocuse**  
*The legend*

**David Myers**  
*The Gypsy Chef*

**Thomas Keller**  
*Michelin Master*

**A spot of tiffin**  
*Mumbai's Dabbawallahs*

**Reza Mahammad**  
*The Spice Prince*

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32  
40

48

66



98

52



12

20

76



84



54

26

80

# contents

## February 2018

- 7** **ARRIVALS**  
**News** This month we visit the region's latest places to stay and eat
- 18** **The Food and Travel Awards**  
It's that time – discover who has made the final expert judging round of the 2018 Awards
- 12** **TALK**  
**The interview** Thomas Keller, his three Michelin-starred restaurant, The French Laundry has been twice voted World's Best Restaurant
- 38** **Omer Kaddouri** The President & CEO of Rotana Hotels talks shop
- 66** **Reza Mahammad** The Spice Prince; restaurateur, renowned TV chef and a best-selling author
- 76** **Jean-Luc Vila** Chef Vila has been the culinary force behind Bateel's expansion beyond premium dates, to include luxury boutiques, artisanal bakeries & premium cafés
- 80** **Gypsy Chef** David Myers is a Michelin-starred chef, restaurateur, and TV personality, with a host of well-deserved awards and accolades
- 84** **Legendary Paul Bocuse**  
We pay tribute to the titan of the kitchen, holder of three Michelin stars for over half a century and more awards than you could shake a stick at; the late great Paul Bocuse
- 98** **The last word** The Hairy Bikers, we discover what makes these two much beloved cooks tick, as they celebrate their latest Mediterranean Adventure
- 32** **TRAVEL**  
**Thesiger revisited** Wilfred Thesiger was the first modern travel writer to explore the Arabian Peninsula in the 1950's, we retrace his footsteps, and discover what has changed over the years
- 42** **Secrets of the Forest** Thala Beach Nature Reserve - a dream getaway in Australia's tropical northeast
- 48** **The pursuit of wellness** Vaud: set against the fairy-tale backdrop of snow-capped Alps and the crystal-clear waters of Lake Geneva, what better place to detox
- 60** **Seven seas of wry** Food and Travel columnist Kevin Pilley meets Mumbai's legendary Dabbawallahs
- 70** **Himalayan health** We discover a luxury spa resort situated in the Himalayan foothills of Northern India.
- 20** **FOOD**  
**The pantry** We discover inspired tasty recipes for cherries and Chinese five-spice
- 54** **A taste of the wild** A curated culinary safari across Southern Africa
- 62** **Food: Living, Loving, Remembering, Writing** For many, food is at the heart of family life and culture; discover how food, life, passion and the written word have become intertwined
- 94** **Recipes** This month's collection of mouth-watering recipes for you to try at home
- 26** **DESTINATIONS**  
**An oasis of luxury** We visit Dubai's One&Only Royal Mirage
- 86** **Bleu Blanc** A little touch of France in Dubai
- 89** **TRIED & TASTED**  
**Bouchon Bakery** The brainchild of Thomas Keller, Bouchon Bakery is the latest addition to the restaurant scene at The Beach, JBR in Dubai.
- 90** **Places to eat** The quest for new foods and new flavours, the discovery of new places & new friends, the latest restaurants and the finest cooking
- 92** **Places to stay** Exciting destinations, fabulous hotels, serving up the very best the world has to offer

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# Arrivals

*News and views from the worlds of food and travel*

## Light up the world

**B**right lanterns set the sky ablaze across China as locals celebrate entering the Year of the Dog on 16 February. It marks a series of festivals to welcome in the year, lasting up until the Lantern Festival (Yun Xiao) on the 15th day of the lunisolar calendar. The nation is bathed in red light to symbolise vitality, good luck and happiness.

Make a beeline for the centre of Beijing where the packed streets are lined with dancers and stilt walkers. Watch the Lantern Festival from Chaoyang Park and be sure to stay around for the impressive fireworks display, because you can be sure that the Chinese know how to put on a great display.

The festival was born from a myth about a girl, Yun Xio, who was reunited with her parents after she was separated for many months. For more good luck don't miss the stone monkey at the Baiyun Guan temple, found through the Arched Mountain gate. Touch its head and you will ward off evil spirits for the whole year. Celebrate Chinese New Year – The Year of the Dog 16 February 2018

## SEGRETO Dubai

For a romantic evening Italian style, try Segreto, the Italian fine dining restaurant located in Souk Madinat Jumeirah, the ideal destination for al fresco dining in the cooler winter months, with stunning views of the Madinat complex waterways in a secluded area of the Souk Madinat. This award-winning Italian dining spot invites you to celebrate your love over an eclectic four-course, authentic Italian menu. Transporting you on a culinary experience to the rustic surrounds of a Venetian paradise, the exclusive menu includes authentic Italian delicacies. Enjoy the exclusiveset menu including a cocktail on arrival, with a special celebration planned for the evening of the 14th. Want to up the romance? Then book a Dining under the Stars or Dining by the Waterways package. Available, February 14 6:30pm onwards

*Prices at \$205 per couple for the Dining Under the Stars or Dining by the Waterways four-course set menus. For more information or reservations: +971 4 432 3232 / restaurants@jumeirah.com*



# news

News from the worlds of food and travel

## CRAZY LOVE Dubai

This Valentine's Azure Beach is mixing love with leisure, and a touch of pink grape for good measure; to make a one-of-a-kind romantic day. The Crazy Love Brunch at Azure Beach on 14 February has added rosé to the roses with unlimited rosé sangria, strawberry and raspberry mojitos, house red, white and rosé, and soft drinks with starters, mains, and dessert trays. The romance doesn't stop there. From 6pm until closing, the Azure Lounge is offering 2 for 1 on rosé sangria, watermelon martinis, and strawberry mojitos! With funky beats all through the evening, and romantic views of the Arabian Gulf, make for a special Valentine's Day.

If you can't wait until Valentine's Day for some pampering, relaxation, and beach vibes, don't forget Azure's Ladies Pool Days every Monday and Tuesday, the Sunset Tribe offering 2 for 1 beverages every weekday from 6pm to 8pm at the Azure Lounge, and the Take Me to Bed Brunch every Saturday from 1pm to 4pm where you can grab a cabana and live the life of luxury!

Azure Beach is open Sunday to Saturday: Pool: 10am until 7pm, Lounge: 11am until last guests leave and Shisha service: 11am until last guests leave; the Kitchen closes at 11.30pm. Brunch packages start at \$95pp. *For more information +971 52 777 9472 reservations@azure-beach.com azure-beach.com*



## DUSIT THANI ABU DHABI

Take romance to the next level with an intimate and exquisite meal with your special someone and celebrate the bond of togetherness like never before. Embark on a Thai culinary legacy at Benjarong where you can indulge in a tastefully crafted five-course set menu, coupled with two complimentary glasses of bubbly and a red rose for ladies. Served on 14 February from 7pm onwards; prices start at \$65pp. Or visit the suave and elegant Capital Grill that serves a fine range of Australian and American prime cuts of beef. Treat your valentine to a mouth-watering five-course dinner in an elegant setting where romance never fades. Enjoy a complimentary glass of bubbly and the ladies get a red rose. *Available 14 February from 7pm; priced at \$79pp For more information of reservations call +971 02 698 8137 or email reservation.table@dusit.com www.dusit.com*



## THAI VALENTINE BAHRAIN

Royal Thai is to be found in an oriental pagoda located in the gardens of the Gulf Hotel. The décor of the large restaurant has an authentic Asian feel, to accompany some of the best Thai cuisine available in Bahrain. This award-winning restaurant makes for the perfect romantic evening this Valentine's Day; enjoy an exquisite four-course set menu from Royal Thai's resident Thai master chef, followed by an after-dinner party in the Gulf Hotel's popular Typhoon Lounge located in hotel's tropical gardens adjacent to the restaurant. Prices start at \$160 per couple inclusive of selected beverages. *For more information: +973 177 46421 gulfhotelbahrain.com*



## FAIRMONT THE PALM DUBAI

If you are wondering how to spend Valentine's night this year, why not take your your partner to Fairmont The Palm for a romantic night to remember. Enjoy a delicious Valentine's menu from one of the Fairmont's great restaurants; the Seagrill Restaurant and Lounge will be cupid's delight, think twinkly lights, dim lit lighting and its signature appetising Mediterranean cuisine for anyone looking to add a chic flair to their evening. Savour a four-course set menu, starting with salmon and caviar, pan seared scallops, seabass or beef tenderloin before finishing with a rich red velvet cheesecake to share. Rose and a polaroid picture moment provided. Available 14 & 15 February, 7pm – 11.30pm from \$195 per couple. Little Miss India is serving a four-course sharing menu, dishes include appetizers such as chargrilled prawns and crispy corn and coriander cakes, butter chicken and braised lamb to name but a few. Available 14-16 February, 6.30pm – 11.00pm from \$135 per couple including a welcome drink. Or visit the Mashrabiya Lounge, dine al fresco on the terrace in the afternoon, and treat yourself to afternoon tea of dainty sandwiches and fresh pastries; available throughout February from \$44pp. *For dinner reservations, contact +971 4457 3457 or email palm.dinning@fairmont.com*



## DUKES Dubai

Steal yourself away for a romantic escape and fall in love all over again at DUKES Dubai with their Romantic Escape package. In addition to early check-in, late check-out and complimentary Wi-Fi, couples can enjoy dinner, in-room breakfast and a gift of chocolates, rose petals and a bottle of house wine.

For families enjoy their 'Stay and play' package and visit the region's largest entertainment destination, Dubai Parks and Resorts. Hotel guests receive two complimentary tickets to access one of the four parks: MOTIONGATE™ Dubai, Bollywood Parks™ Dubai, LEGOLAND® Dubai or LEGOLAND® Water Park.

Looking for a Weekend Getaway and enjoy a 20% discount on Best Available Rates, along with all the usual perks including complimentary buffet breakfast and 25% off on all food and beverage outlets (except in-room dining). Or take advantage of the 'Stay longer, pay less' offer: stay for a minimum of seven nights and pay 30% less on Best Available Rates. All DUKES Dubai room offers include: free Buffet Breakfast at the Great British Restaurant for 2 adults; 25% off on all food & beverage outlets (except in-room dining); free Wi-Fi access Free early check in & late check out subject to availability; free access to the hotel leisure facilities and DUKESY Kids' Club, free shuttle service thrice daily to Dubai Marina Mall and Mall of the Emirates. *All offers are valid until 31 May 2018, for terms and more information visit [www.dukesdubai.com](http://www.dukesdubai.com) or call +971 4 455 1111*





## RIVIERA SEAFOOD GRILL Dubai

There's a reason the Mediterranean is known for its romance, its passion, and its 'joie de vivre'. The combination of great food, excellent wine, and the waves lapping the sandy shore makes for an unforgettable evening, and the Make Me Blush brunch has everything you need to make a lasting impression. Let the Mediterranean come to you this Valentine's Day at Riviera Seafood Grill. Nothing says romance like the French Riviera, the vineyards of Italy, or the white-washed shores of Greece. The Mediterranean has always been the place where love and life collide, and at Riviera Seafood Grill love is truly in the air. On February 14, dine like the Italians, laugh like the Spanish, love like the French, and lounge like the Greeks. Riviera's Make Me Blush Brunch includes a three-course meal, and special prices on Europe's finest aphrodisiacs, oysters and grape! Available on February 14 from 7pm to 11:30pm. The Blush Brunch is priced at \$60pp including selection of starter, main, and dessert, and special discounts on oysters and grape.

If you can't wait until Valentine's? The 'Ce Soir' brunch means that as the sun sets on Friday the weekend really begins, while Seafood Sunday's live fish market serves the freshest 'frutti del mare,' and Monday and Tuesday raise a toast to the ladies at 'Saluti Señoras' with 2 for 1 beverages.

For more information +971 5 2777 9473 email [reservations@riviera-grill.com](mailto:reservations@riviera-grill.com) or visit [www.riviera-grill.com](http://www.riviera-grill.com).

## Royal Mansour Marrakech

The Royal Mansour, a haven of discreet luxury in the heart of Marrakech, its 53 luxurious riads are hidden amongst winding alleyways and lush landscaped gardens creating an enchanting oasis in the heart of the city. The new contemporary Poolside Pavilions nestled amongst the palm trees offer the ultimate privacy and comfort as you lounge by the pool. The recently opened Le Jardin restaurant, overseen by legendary three star Michelin Chef Yannick Alléno, will delight you with creative gourmet tastes served beside the garden, surrounded by the fragrance of jasmine and orange flower. Famous Marrakech sights including the Jemaa el Fna Square and Koutoubia Mosque, are all within walking distance from the hotel for you to explore the bustling souks, before returning to the serene tranquility of the hotel.

Royal Mansour is offering couples a unique romantic experience this Valentine's Day, letting you celebrate your love in style at one of the most beautiful hotels in the world. From the moment you set foot in Morocco, you will receive royal treatment; Fast Track service at Marrakech Airport and then whisked to Royal Mansour by a luxury private transfer. Upon arrival at the hotel you will be shown to your romantically decorated 1,500 sq.ft. Superior One Bedroom Riad. Breakfast is served in the privacy of your own rooftop terrace overlooking the snow-capped Atlas Mountains. A couple's treatment in a private Spa Suite at Royal Mansour's award-winning Spa is also included, followed by a romantic dinner at La Table Restaurant.

You can also show your affection by gifting an experience from Royal Mansour's online boutique. Gifts include a Gourmet Afternoon Tea, a private Poolside Pavilion Day or Super Fine Dining. The Spa also serves as an ideal gift this Valentine's Day offering traditional Moroccan Hammams, the 'Escape for a Day' package, or a romantic private massage in the Spa Suite. In addition, the boutique offers an exclusive selection of hand-crafted jewellery and haute couture caftans available to purchase. The Royal Mansour's Valentine's Day package starts at \$3,595 per stay, including three nights in a Superior One Bedroom Riad for two people. The package includes daily breakfast served at La Table or in your private riad, romantic Valentine's Day decorations in the riad, a Valentine's dinner at La Table, and a spa treatment for two in a private Spa Suite. The offer also includes a fast track service upon arrival and departure at Marrakech Airport, and private transfers from and to Marrakech Airport. *The offer is valid from 12 to 19 February 2018. For more information or to book visit [www.royalmansour.com](http://www.royalmansour.com) or call +212 529 80 80 80*

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A close-up portrait of chef Thomas Keller, wearing a white chef's coat, looking slightly to the right. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with greenery and a white railing.

# *Thomas* KELLER

Internationally renowned chef, restaurateur, and author, Thomas Keller holds a total of 7 Michelin stars, a Legion of Honour, numerous James Beard awards, and his three Michelin-starred restaurant, The French Laundry has been twice voted World's Best Restaurant

The most celebrated and indeed decorated chef in America is not the easiest person to interview. When we meet in Dubai, Thomas Keller is straight off the plane from San Francisco and is not yet mid-way through a full day of back-to-back interviews, photo shoots and cooking demonstrations. While he's certainly not unfriendly, he does have a tendency to seize upon a question or turn of phrase that doesn't sit well with him and run with it.

As an interviewer this quite rightly means that you need to be constantly ready to substantiate or defend your line of questioning and in doing so show Keller the respect that he both commands and wholeheartedly deserves. At 62 years of age his place on the list of culinary greats has long been established: he is the only American-born chef to run multiple restaurants with three Michelin stars (The French Laundry and Per Se) and the accolades bestowed upon are far too many to list, but suffice to say, all the important ones are there. He has been made a Chevalier of the French Legion of Honour, is the bearer of a number of James Beard Foundation awards and as well as being recognised several times over by the Culinary Institute of America, is also on their board of trustees.

Keller is in Dubai for the launch of the UAE's first Bouchon Bakery at The Beach, opposite Jumeirah Beach Residences. He says that he hopes that the spot will become an integral part of the community, in much the same way the original Bouchon Bakery in Yountville,

*“Keller’s place on the list of culinary greats has long been established: he is the only American-born chef to run multiple restaurants with three Michelin stars”*

Napa Valley has. “We want people to come here not because it’s a Thomas Keller restaurant, but because it’s a great place to stop and have a conversation with friends or read the newspaper or treat your child to a Nutter Butter. A bakery is about community, and that’s what we want to express.”

When asked if his approach to setting up a relatively casual spot such as Bouchon Bakery differs to that of a more high-end concept, his response is swift - cutting even. “You know, it’s not really a concept. It’s not something that we pull out of the air and say ‘this is the concept we want to do’. When we opened the first Bouchon Bakery sixteen years ago it had a real purpose. At the time we had French Laundry and Bouchon restaurant and we really wanted to bake our own bread in order to elevate what we were offering our guests,” he explains. “We needed to bake bread. What do you do if you need to bake bread? You open a bakery. That’s how simple it is. I hate the word concept, because it makes it sound like we’re in the automotive business or something – like we’re conceptualising what we’re doing –, when actually restaurants are emotional and there always needs to be an emotional connection.”

The words emotion and memory pop up time and time again in conversation with Keller and these ideas are integral to his culinary style and approach; one of his most famous dishes is a whimsical

## THE INTERVIEW

THOMAS KELLER

This spread, clockwise: Bouchon Bistro, Las Vegas dining room; Dining at The French Laundry; Fine dining at The French Laundry; Thomas Keller at Bouchon Bakery, Dubai; Bouchon Bakery's French Toast.



amuse bouche of salmon tartare cornets styled to resemble the ice cream cones of our childhood. "At the end of the day a successful restaurant is not about fame or fortune, it's about giving people memories. The bottom line is that our success is based on giving you, the guest, a memory," he asserts.

Precise, dedicated, meticulous, a perfectionist: all these descriptors and many more like them have been attributed to Keller and these traits have certainly played a role in his remarkable success. While his food and cooking may be all about evoking and making memories, his approach is pragmatic and measured. "What we want to do in our restaurant every night is have a great service – it's like a baseball team, a sports franchise. We go to work every day having the opportunity to be successful or not. If 90 people come to the restaurant and 89 have a great time but one person doesn't, then we're disappointed in our performance because we weren't able to be successful with that person. That's how critical we are of ourselves."

Putting that sort of exacting pressure upon yourself on a daily basis must be a rather exhausting way to live, I suggest. "We're the most critical people in the world – and when I say we, I mean our profession – when it comes to what we do. We know we can do a better job, every day," he replies.

If he measures success by the impact a visit to one of his restaurants has upon the guest, it begs the question what do awards, accolades and particularly Michelin stars mean to him. "They reinforce what you're doing, but they're about what you did yesterday. We're not really thinking about what we did yesterday. We're thinking about what we're going to do tomorrow," Keller says. "We don't get



*“If you want to be the best at what you choose to do, then you’re driven.”*

caught up in the accolades. I mean it's nice and I'm proud that we have three stars and of all the different things that we've done, but we need to keep moving forward and thinking about tomorrow. If we do the right things today for tomorrow, then the awards will come again.”

The subject is clearly one he feels passionate about and he goes on to make a hugely pertinent point: “If you want to be the best at what you choose to do, then you’re driven. Accolades only reinforce that you’re on the right track – and sometimes they don’t even do that – you first need to have confidence and trust in the accolade.”

“The different communities that think they can bestow upon you an award are a dime a dozen these days. I'm not saying that Michelin is, but if someone calls me up and says ‘I want to honour you by giving you an award’, I say to them: ‘Who are you, and what gives a food and wine event in Timbuktu the authority to give me an award?’.”

When asked whether he still enjoys being in the kitchen, the reply comes immediately: “Of course. Absolutely. For me it's all about my team and being part of a team.” Keller is known for his commitment to driving culinary excellence amongst young chefs and places what seems like a vast amount of pressure on himself to nurture the next generation of cooks. “If a chef comes into our kitchen who has the right attitude and personality to thrive, we have to give them the support, the tools, the training and the expertise they need to perform. If we somehow fail in giving them what they need, and then they fail, it's our fault, not theirs.”

“Whatever level someone comes in at, once we hire them we're going to train them, and train them and train them” he adds. “How long do you train a person for? Who knows. You train them and then you mentor them – both professionally and personally. And what happens if you do those things successfully? You get a person who is better than you are. Because if they're not better than you are, then you've done a bad job hiring them, training them, and mentoring them. It's all about that – making them better than you are.”

This is a big statement for any boss or leader to make. But for a man as revered and respected as Keller, it's huge. He goes on: “I sit here today and tell you that Corey Lee, Corey Chow, Eli Kaimah, Jonathon Benno, David Breeden, Grant Achatz [all chefs who either work or have worked for Keller] are all better than I am. And I'm proud of that – because I've done a really good job. Why are they better



## THE INTERVIEW

### THOMAS KELLER

This page: Salmon Rillet; The French Laundry;  
Fine dining at The French Laundry.



*“You need to challenge yourself to do new things in order to understand what you’re really capable of”*

than I am? Because I made them better. And if they’re not better, then I’ve done a bad job and I don’t want to do a bad job.”

In 2017, twenty-one years after the restaurant first opened, The French Laundry underwent an extensive and costly renovation. Keller was 61 when he commissioned the revamp and although he shows no sign of retiring, he says that he embarked on the project with an eye to the future.

“When I decided we should do it, it was at a moment in my life when I felt – and I still feel partially – that to push myself I had to get uncomfortable, and that’s truly what I did. You need to challenge yourself to do new things in order to understand what you’re really capable of.

“We built a brand-new outside of the restaurant itself and two new buildings that are very foreign to us in the way they look, operate and function. It’s pushing us forward and has made us reevaluate what we’re doing; the space is designed to be free flowing and to allow us to discover new ways of establishing our restaurant and take it to the next level – not necessarily the next level in cuisine, but in the evolution of the restaurant. So far, everybody loves it.”

Keller admits that despite the overwhelmingly positive response to the changes, he feels a sense of nostalgia for the restaurant that was. This is perhaps made all the more poignant thanks to the knowledge that 21 years into the future, he probably won’t be cooking there. “I wanted to give new purpose, new reason, new opportunities to those behind me. I don’t know where I’ll be in 20 years - I haven’t worked that out yet. I think it’s important for me to be part of this

profession still, but it certainly doesn’t have to be inside of restaurant.”

On the subject of change in the culinary world, of modernity, food trends and fads, and the current proliferation of fast-casual restaurants and what this means for the more traditional style of fine dining, Keller is straight to the point: “A couple of weeks ago a journalist asked me what I’m doing to stay relevant – it’s one of those absurd media questions. Paul Bocuse said sixty years ago that your restaurant is relevant if it’s full and that’s still true today.”

From talk of Bocuse, the [late great] grandmaster of French cooking, our conversation turns to legacies and I ask Keller what he would like his to be. Once again, the answer is parried back at lightening speed: “Somebody else will decide that”. When pressed further, he says: “Hopefully I will be remembered as somebody who was a leader and had an impact on our profession. You want to have changed things, so that people have better opportunities than you had”. Thomas Keller has, without question, already achieved that.

Words: Sarah Price  
Images: Bouchon Bakery, French Laundry





SMALL  
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## ALEENTA PHUKET - PHANG NGA RESORT & SPA, THAILAND

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**2018**  
**AWARDS**



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In December, we announced the finalists for 2018 GCC Food & Travel Awards

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to discover who has made the finals in each category

**GRIF**  
GLOBAL RESTAURANT INVESTMENT FORUM



# THE Pantry



PHOTOGRAPHY AND PROP STYLING: SUKAINA RAJABALI  
WORDS, RECIPES AND FOOD STYLING: SARAH PRICE

KEY INGREDIENT:

# Cherries



**G**orgeous glossy cherries, all jammy and plump with juice, are the little treasures of the fruit bowl. Although there are many different types, flavour wise they fall into two distinct categories: sweet cherries, which can be eaten as is, or the sour-tart variety, such as Morello or Montmorency, which are better suited to cooking.

Cast your gaze about the about the Middle East and you'll discover a proliferation of recipes that celebrate this ingredient. From Persian rice flecked golden with

saffron and studded with fresh cherries to rich lamb kofta drizzled with a sweet, tangy cherry sauce and tall glasses of pastel-hued sharbatah albaloo, there is plenty in this region for fans of the fruit. That said, this is an ingredient that also feels quintessentially British. There's something about cherries that brings to mind a dreamy, idealized England of many years ago, when the pace of life was slower and grassy orchards were filled with cherry trees heavy with ruby red orbs.

Heading back to the here and now,

cherries are much talked about for their high antioxidant count and have anti-inflammatory properties too, as well being a good source of fibre, vitamins and essential minerals. Health experts suggest that you'll need to eat fourteen cherries for a portion to count as one of your five-a-day, and while doing so might initially sound like rather a lot to, it is certainly no hardship.

When buying cherries seek out those that feel tender to the touch and have taut, unblemished skin with a nice shine. It's also well worth smelling them - a ripe cherry will



BALSAMIC-ROASTED  
CHERRY SALAD

RECIPES START ON PAGE 94

have a floral, vaguely almond-like aroma. Thanks in part to this flavour note the fruit makes a harmonious match with the nut itself. To see what we mean try adding a dash of almond extract to a cherry pie filling, let the frangipane layer in a Bakewell tart be lifted by cherry (rather than more traditional raspberry) jam or simply serve a big bowl of cherries scattered with toasted almonds and a bowl of softly whipped cream on the side.

If you're on the hunt for a dessert for Valentine's Day though we say look no further than our recipe for individual cherry and almond clafoutis. This dish really couldn't be simpler to prepare; make the sweet, almond-flavoured batter the night before and decide whether or not you're

going to pit your cherries too – tradition says it's perfectly acceptable to leave the stones in, but you might want to make the extra effort in the spirit of romance. On the evening itself all you need do is pour the batter into two into shallow dishes, dot with fruit and bake.

If your Valentine's dessert is sorted, but the main course is still undecided might we suggest a kale, bresaola and balsamic-cherry salad finished with milky, mild goats' cheese and toasted almonds? Once again, there's minimal cooking involved (just the gentle roasting of the fruit) yet the dish feels special, looks and tastes great and is filling without being heavy. In other words, it's perfect for the 14th.

While it's perfectly acceptable to buy Chinese five-spice powder ready-made - we all lead busy lives and timesaving shortcuts are welcome - if the idea appeals it really is worth having a go at making your own.

The classic ingredients for this ancient spice mix that is so popular in Chinese cooking typically features sweet cinnamon and ground cloves, aniseed-like fennel seeds, tongue-tingling Szechuan peppercorns and star anise. The result is something special: a bright, beguiling, complex-tasting mix of sweet, sour, bitter, salty flavour that add layers of interest and a sense of the exotic each and every time it is used.

FIVE-SPICE ROASTED  
AUBERGINE



KEY INGREDIENT:  
*Chinese five-spice*



## FIVE-SPICE MALT LOAF

**RECIPES** START ON PAGE 94

The nice thing about making your own of course is that you can tinker with the ratios of the spices, until you stumble upon your own preferred blend. For a superior end result grind the spices yourself in a pestle and mortar rather than buying them in powdered form. Once you do so, store in an airtight container away from direct sunlight.

Five-spice can be used to season meat with great success: try mixing with olive oil and brushing over skin-on duck breasts before roasting or rolling a room temperature steak in the powder just seconds before it's deposited in a searing hot pan. Thanks to its punchy, distinctive flavour this is an

ingredient capable of taking vegetable dishes to the next level as well. At a time when for health and environmental reasons many of us are trying to eat less meat, this is welcome news. A winter vegetable stir-fry made with parsnips, leafy Brussels sprouts, celeriac or turnips and a few of the meatier mushrooms such as Portobello and shiitake all quickly wok-cooked and tossed with soy sauce, five-spice and a dash of honey is a weeknight supper solution if there ever was one. And while serving a vegetarian main course to a group of meat eaters can feel like a bold move for a dinner party, try our recipe for succulent, smoky, charred

around the edges aubergine strewn with molasses drenched pomegranate seeds and accompanied by tender rice and zesty, garlicky labneh and we really don't think anyone will complain.

Despite what you may think, five-spice isn't just for savoury dishes; it's brilliant for adding warmth and interest to desserts and bakes too. If a recipe calls for cinnamon – banana bread, apple crumble, baklava or rice pudding, for example – use five-spice instead and see if you agree. For something tried, tested, and dutifully devoured, you really can't go wrong with this five-spice malt loaf with mascarpone though.





## THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE WORK IN THE WINE INDUSTRY BUT FEW END UP ON THE BOTTLE.

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With the 55th Signature, we salute Andrew Murphy. Murph started his working life in the cellar where he quickly rose to Cellar Manager, qualified as a Winemaker, was promoted to Operations Manager and is today our Director of Wine.

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FAMILY VIGNERONS C. 1849

Judy Argent  
2008

Clive Weston  
2009

Jane Ferrar  
2010

Robert Hill-Smith  
2012

Andrew Murphy  
2013

This spread: The Entrance at The Palace

# One & Only Royal Mirage

When the Royal Mirage first opened its doors, it was *the* place to stay; and now almost two decades later it still is!



“The hotel offers unabashed opulent luxury, yet still retains an understated elegance and exclusive charm”

## WORLD TRAVELLER

This spread, clockwise: Celebrities restaurant; Main lobby; Bar & Grill view; Celebrities bar; Royal Suite master bedroom



The Royal Mirage is a tribute to the luxury of days gone by, an architectural showpiece that reflects the traditional warmth of its Arabic heritage, combined with the classical grace of European style; set amidst 65 acres of lush landscaped gardens and a kilometre of pristine white beach that is gently lapped by the turquoise waters of the Arabia Gulf. The hotel offers unabashed opulent luxury, yet still retains an understated elegance and exclusive charm.

Royal Mirage is one of Dubai's most stylish beach resorts, offering first-class service and genuine luxury. The Royal Mirage resort consists of three distinct properties: The Palace, the Arabian Court and the Residence & Spa.

### LOCATION

The hotel is conveniently situated close to Dubai Marina, with views of the Palm and only 30 minutes from Dubai International Airport and about 70 minutes from Abi Dhabi International Airport. Shopping at Mall of Emirates, the indoor ski slopes, The Atlantis and a rich array of restaurants and cafes are all just a short cab ride away.

### THE RESORT

The Palace conjures the magic of Arabia, where you can stroll in the verdant gardens, explore the meandering water features. The private beach offers a range of leisure facilities, including temperature-controlled swimming pools, water sports centre, tennis courts, golf putting green, children's facilities an outstanding selection of dining choices, and, most importantly, a tranquil haven for rest and relaxation.

The Arabian Court features striking architecture amidst a landscape of fountains, walkways and lush gardens. The discreet entrance leads to the impressive grand gallery, the that links the two wings of the property and guides you towards the rooms and suites, all of which are facing the sea, and enjoy either a private balcony or garden patio. The three restaurants provide a culinary voyage through the kitchens of the world.

The Residence & Spa is a member of "Leading Hotels of the World". The Arabian styled private residences each cared for by a specially selected, dedicated team, house a retreat of suites and Prestige rooms that are spacious, and stylish. This elegant haven has its own discreet reception, private restaurant and lounge.



“A setting that offers romance and charm in equal measure; a luxury home from home”



## STYLE

A setting that offers romance and charm in equal measure. A luxury home from home; elegant furniture inlaid with mother-of-pearl, Moroccan lanterns, serene gardens, bubbling fountains and an oriental hammam.

## SERVICE

Staff training shines through; they are discrete and friendly, offering impeccable service, with a strong ethos of respecting guests' privacy. Not to mention probably some of the best service of any restaurants in Dubai.

## STAY

All the rooms in the resort boast balconies or private gardens, enjoying wonderful sea views. The accommodations are decorated in a palette of warm earthy hues, plush carpets, decorative features, large marble bathrooms with deep tubs and luxuriant furnishings

## EAT & DRINK

The choice of dining at the Royal Mirage includes: all-day-

dining in the casual surroundings of Olives, where you can enjoy Mediterranean cuisine set amidst whitewashed stucco walls, marble-topped tables, with stained glass, wrought iron chandeliers and vibrant crockery or dine on the bougainvillea-covered terrace that overlooks the palm-shaded pool.

Tagine is a truly Moroccan affair. The experience starts as soon as you enter the foyer. The furnishings, object d'arts, Tadlekt hand-polished walls and the terracotta tiled floors all come from the region creating an ambiance of an old Marrakech home.

A grand marble staircase takes you to Celebrities, which features exquisite European cuisine. A fountain gently trickles over hand-painted tiles, creating a welcoming atmosphere, further enhanced by romantic lighting from the crystal chandeliers and a multi-level interior that overlooks the lushly landscaped gardens; the perfect location for intimate evening.

Celebrities Bar is one of the most elegant venues in town. It boasts a sleek marble bar, lacquered table tops, and soft black leather and velvet lounge seating; and a picturesque outdoor lounge, setting the perfect mood for pre and post-dinner cocktails.

The Beach Bar & Grill is set by the golden sands at the edge of



This page, clockwise: Beach garden villa; Arabian Court entrance; Chefs; Oriental hammam pool



“The Royal Mirage offers a breath-taking setting, discrete friendly service, fine dining, and the beauty and privacy of its exclusive grounds.”

the lush gardens, with a backdrop of swaying palm. Informal by day as you sit on the shaded wooden terrace as you watch the waves roll in, whilst you enjoy platters of freshly grilled seafood and light salads. By night The Beach dresses up; from its intimate courtyard to the open deck, where candles flicker and the warm glow of the night abounds.

The Jetty Lounge is an elegant beachside lounge housed in chic Arabian architecture with contemporary interiors. Its tranquil beach setting, overlooking the pristine waters of Palm Island Bay; providing the perfect place to unwind. Indulge in a wide selection of grape, bubbly and cocktails which are perfectly complemented by delicious and light tapas.

If you are looking for something a little more lively then visit Kasbar.

The multi-faceted evening venue contributes more than a touch of Arabian glamour to the resort. Low level seating, deep cushions, bars on every one of its three floors, a spectacular crystal chandelier, brightly coloured stucco walls, televisions in every recess and a spacious dance floor set to the tunes produced by the musical host provide the definitive Kasbar experience.

**EXPERIENCE**

The Royal Mirage offers a breath-taking setting, a wide range of activities, discrete friendly service, and fine dining, combined with the beauty and privacy of its exclusive grounds; a destination in its own right - this is a must-visit hotel.

[www.oneandonlyresorts.com](http://www.oneandonlyresorts.com)

Words by Francesca Jackson

# YOUR WORLD. YOUR WAY. *your moment.*




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This spread, clockwise: Empty Quarter; Al Baleed Archaeological Park, Salah; Wilfred Thesiger and Musallim bin Al Kamam; Mubarak Bin Basel Oman.

# Thesiger Revisited

Wilfred Thesiger was the first modern travel writer to explore the Arabian Peninsula, mapping remote oases and endless deserts. *Thesiger Revisited* is dedicated to retracing his footsteps, exploring the towns and villages that he visited in the 1950s, and finding out how they have changed over the years.

Wilfred Thesiger, the Ethiopian-born son of a British Minister, was the first modern day travel writer to explore the Arabian Gulf, leaving behind airplanes and cars, in favour of traditional tribal life, camels, and eating whatever food he could catch. He saw mystic visions on his travels through the Empty Quarter in the Arabian Desert, attended the coronation of Abyssinian Emperor Haile Selassie, and lived with the marshmen of Iraq.

The Gulf has changed beyond recognition since Thesiger visited in the 1950s, but there are still visible traces of what he wrote about in his book *Arabian Sands*. In the book, Thesiger set off from Salah deep into the Empty Quarter of the Arabian Desert, meeting tribes that the world forgot, and witnessing natural sights unlike anywhere else. He visited Abu Dhabi when it was a small seaside settlement, made of single-storey coral houses and Sharjah's litter-covered

streets. And he experienced Al Ain, Buraimi Oasis, and Wahiba Sands before the tourist crowds discovered them.

## **SALALAH TO SHISR**

Wilfred Thesiger's journey across the Arabian Peninsula really began in Oman, in the southern town of Salah. He wrote:

'A landscape of black rocks and yellow sand sloped down to the Empty Quarter. I looked out over the desert. It stretched away unbroken for fifteen hundred miles to the orchards round Damascus and the red cliffs of Rum.'

Standing atop the Aftalgot Cliffs at the edge of Salah, modern day travellers can see what captivated Thesiger more than six decades ago. At one side, endless views of the Arabian Sea and the hundreds of huge cargo ships that pass by every day. At the



‘A landscape of black rocks and yellow sand sloped down to the Empty Quarter. I looked out over the desert. It stretched away unbroken for fifteen hundred miles to the orchards round Damascus and the red cliffs of Rum.’



other side, a wide expanse of white sandy desert with a spine of towering peaks leading the way deep into the sparsely populated Arabian Desert. If you come at the right time of year, the lush green forests that magically rise from the arid sands when the rains fall create a spectacular vision that will never be forgotten.

When Thesiger and his exploration party of Bedouin tribesmen left Salalah they:

‘... moved down to the pool of Aiyun, which lies beneath sheer-sided limestone cliffs two hundred feet in height, at the head of the Wadi Ghudun. This deep pool, which is fed by a small spring, is a hundred and fifty yards long and thirty yards across, and its still, green waters are fringed with rushes.’

Today, the pool of Aiyun is a popular local fishing hotspot, where Dhofari locals can often be seen in their dishdasha with wooden



This spread clockwise: Hilton Al Ain Abu Dhabi; Wadi in Oman; Wilfred Thesiger & Friends; Madain Saleh Near Al Ula, Saudi Arabia; Fort, Abu Dhabi.



**‘We approached a small Arab town on an open beach (Sharjah); it was as drab and tumble-down as Abu Dhabi, but infinitely more squalid, for it was littered with discarded rubbish which had been mass-produced elsewhere.’**

fishing rods trying to catch their dinner. It is an awesome sight that offers a refreshing escape from the dry air as you get closer to the desert, further away from the sea. The green rushes and lily pads that caught Thesiger's eye are still there, swaying in the light breeze.

‘We travelled slowly northwards following the Ghudun, one of the five dry river-beds which run down from the coastal range to form the great trunk wadi of Umm al Hait. Gouged out from the limestone plateau the Ghudun begins abruptly as canyon two hundred feet below the desert floor.’

Thesiger trekked along the wadi to the deep canyon at Ghudun. Today the Wadi Ghudun is an area of outstanding natural beauty, with cascading waterfalls dropping from orange limestone hills and mountains into flowing turquoise rivers and streams. Along the path of the rivers, thick palm trees and bushes line the way to the mysterious prehistoric stone burial mounds that have laid untouched for millennia. From the mounds, views of dry desert shrubs, cliffs shrouded in a thick haze, and the ghostly hue of a setting sun explain why Thesiger decided to visit here.

‘We watered at Shisur, where the ruins of a crude stone fort on a rocky mound mark the position of this famous well, the only permanent water in the central steppes. At the bottom of the large cave which undercuts the mound there was a trickle of water in a deep fissure.’

‘Among the palms (at Mughshin) was a salt-encrusted ditch of very brackish water, three hundred yards long, and in the middle of it a small spring of fresher water just fit to drink.’

‘He said that if we could cross the formidable Uruq al Shaiba, which he described as successive mountains of sand, we should arrive at Dhafara, where in the palm groves of Liwa there were wells and villages.’

‘the Wadi al Ain, the largest of the three great wadis which run down from the Oman mountains into the desert to the west, consisted not of a single dry river-bed, but of several smaller

watercourses separated by banks of gravel and drifts of sand.’

‘We passed through the settlements of Qutuf and Dhaufir. Palms were planted along the salt-flats, close under high steep-sided dunes, and in hollows in the sands. The groves were fenced in, and other fences were built along the dune tops, to try to control the movement of the sands, which in a few places had partly buried the trees.’

‘In Abu Dhabi, a large castle dominated the small dilapidated town which stretched along the shore. There were a few palms, and near them was a well where watered our camels.’

When Thesiger and his Bedouin guides arrived in Abu Dhabi, oil revenues had not yet been used to develop the city, and what lay before him was little more than a small town with dilapidated houses, camels roaming the streets, and the castle home of the ruler of the city-state. Modern Abu Dhabi is possibly as far from the town of Thesiger's day as possible.

Abu Dhabi of the 21st century is a city of towering minarets, glistening office blocks, and world-class attractions. Thesiger could never have imagined a theme park dedicated to fast Ferrari cars, nor would he have ever thought that visitors from around the world could shop in huge malls where international brands from every corner of the world were represented, with no haggling necessary! The palms may still be here, and Liwa Castle still takes pride of place, but the dilapidated buildings have been replaced by perfectly manicured lawns, ultra-luxurious hotels, SUV-filled highways, the uber-modern domes and minarets of the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, and towering glass skyscrapers.

‘Stay in the new ‘hotel’, where the rooms were filled with furniture in the Victorian style. On the walls were framed prints of Scottish lochs and Swiss chalets; there was electric light, fans, and tinned food ... we stayed at Abu Dhabi, a small town of about two thousand inhabitants.’

It is thought that Thesiger stayed at the Subhanallah Hotel and



Restaurant, the most luxurious accommodation option that Abu Dhabi's rulers used to house visiting dignitaries at the time. The building sadly no longer exists, so modern day visitors cannot experience what the weary English man did those decades ago. Not long after Thesiger's visit, however, the Hilton Al Ain was built, making it the oldest luxury hotel still open in the UAE.

The Hilton Al Ain is typical of the architectural style at the time, with white concrete walls, balconies overlooking the border with Oman and the oases of the city, and date palm plantations that make the city so famous.

Since the hotel opened, guests have included Mohammed Ali, Queen Elizabeth II, and the world's tallest man, and until modern hotels were opened in the 2000s in Abu Dhabi city, Shaikh Zayed used the Hilton Al Ain as his venue of choice for large-scale functions, meetings and parties, including a royal wedding. Now the rooms all have power showers, flat screen TVs and luxurious furnishings, but the atmosphere and air of prestige throughout the building has changed little.

'We approached a small Arab town on an open beach (Sharjah); it was as drab and tumble-down as Abu Dhabi, but infinitely more squalid, for it was littered with discarded rubbish which had been mass-produced elsewhere.'

Much like Thesiger's first impressions of Abu Dhabi, his first visit to Sharjah before it had been developed came as a shock. When he visited, Dubai's neighbouring Emirate it was little more than a small military airport on the coast surrounded by crumbling single-storey houses and a handful of small shops selling goods that arrived by sea.

Today, Sharjah would be totally unrecognisable to Thesiger if he was able to visit again. Modern glass and metal high rises, the grand white Ottoman-style Al Noor mosque, and the Al Qasba Eye of the Emirates Ferris wheel would all be alien to him. No longer can Sharjah be described as drab and tumble-down. Today, Sharjah is immaculately clean, modern, and a melting pot of different cultures, religions, and ethnicities.

'... rowing-boats patrolled the creek to pick up passengers from the mouths of alleys between high coral houses, surmounted with



This page: Abu Dhabi skyline today; Spice Souk; Al Fahidi Historical District Wind Towers.



“Behind the diversity of houses which lined the waterfront were the suqs, covered passageways, where merchants sat in the gloom, cross-legged in narrow alcoves among their piled merchandise.”

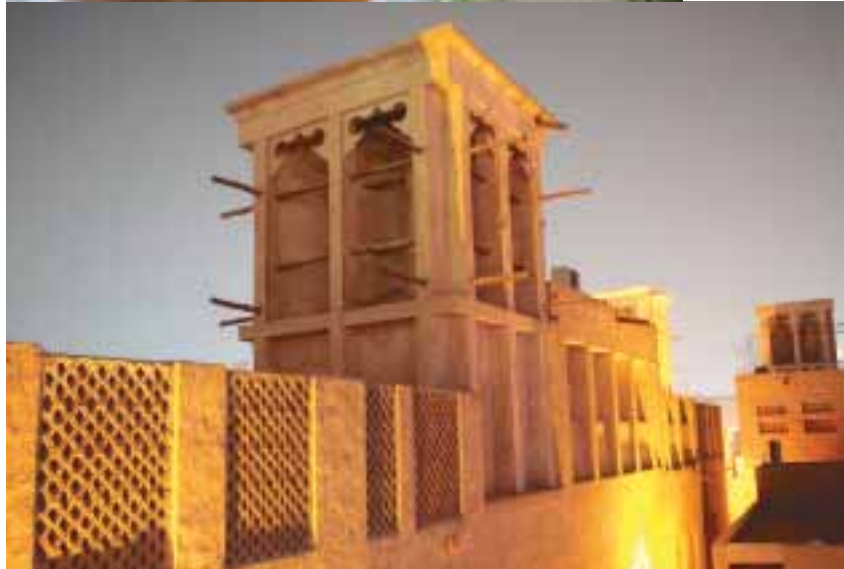
square wind-turrets and pleasingly decorated with plaster moulding. Behind the diversity of houses which lined the waterfront were the suqs, covered passageways, where merchants sat in the gloom, cross-legged in narrow alcoves among their piled merchandise.’

Although much of what Thesiger experienced has changed beyond recognition, his visit to Dubai is perhaps the most familiar. When Thesiger and his accompanying Bedouin tribesmen arrived into the Deira neighbourhood, his senses were assaulted with the sounds of rowing boat paddles hitting the water and people haggling flowing through the air, the smells of fragrant spices and oudhs, and the breeze flowing through the wind turrets. Today, traditional dhows still traverse the waters of Deira creek, authentic high coral houses and wind towers are still visible in the Al Fahidi Historical District, and people still haggle now just like they did those decades ago.

The shaded and endless souqs that Thesiger saw are also still here today. Gold souq is a sight to behold, with row after row of glistening jewellery and watches lined in rows in stall windows. Spice souq is, as the name suggests, the place to buy countless colours and smells of spices and seasonings piled high in huge wicker baskets. And sellers call out to travellers to try and sell their wares – little has changed here since Thesiger’s day.

‘We camped on top of the dunes, two hundred feet above the Wadi Batha. The valley was about six miles across and was bordered on the far side by a narrow belt of sand. Beyond this were low dark hills, and towering above these the stark range of the Hajar. in spite of the haze I could see the peaks of Jabal Jaalan near the coast at the eastern end of the range.’

As his long and arduous trip across the Gulf neared its end, Thesiger, one of the world’s greatest travel writers, made one last stop off at the Wadi Batha in Oman. The wadi was nothing more



than an outpost in an endless desert, with mountains all around and a slow flowing river winding through a valley. Despite this, Thesiger obviously liked being close to nature, being in complete silence with no modern distractions.

Wadi Batha has not changed since Thesiger visited. During the rainy season, shadows are cast over the dark hills that captivated Thesiger so, and the clouds still shroud the towering peaks of Jabal Jaalan. Untamed sandstorms still blow over the wadi, creating alien landscapes unlike anywhere else in the world.

Wilfred Thesiger explored the Arabian Gulf without the luxuries that modern day travellers enjoy. He didn’t have an endless supply of 5-star hotels to choose from. Local tribes were unhappy about his arrival, and he had few friends in the region, save a few Bedouin who supported his long treks through the arid deserts.

The Gulf has changed dramatically since the 1950s, but it is still possible to experience some of what Thesiger loved so much.

Words: Joe Worthington Images: Food and Travel; iStock; UAE Tourism

FEBRUARY



# SAY IT WITH DINNER

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# OMER KADDOURI

President & CEO Rotana talks shop

When Omer Kaddouri first joined Rotana back in 1998 he could never have envisioned that within 20 years of joining the company he would be in charge of a portfolio of over 100 properties across 26 cities in the Middle East, Africa, South Asia and Eastern Europe.

This was partly due to the fact that Rotana only had four hotels at this time and were still viewed as an upstart that would struggle to compete against the established hotel chains. It was also because Kaddouri never dreamed that he would one day sit at the helm of the company as the President and CEO. "I wasn't ambitious in that I didn't plan every step. I never thought I'd even be a general manager," explains Kaddouri. "Growing up I saw my father wheeling and dealing and I liked the idea of following in his footsteps. I applied for a business college in the UK, but after one semester it wasn't working out. I had grown up in Egypt and social life for the expats was based around hotels. So I thought about the hotel business and was able to enrol at Les Roches in Switzerland. I earned my diploma and then my first job was at the Kensington Hilton in London. I was a banquet head waiter and I worked functions so there were lots of late nights and early mornings. That job taught me that hotel business is hard work and that you have to focus and make your customers happy. And I enjoyed the long hours and the pressure." At this stage Kaddouri's interests were more in food and beverage and there was little thought of stepping up the corporate ladder. Even when accepting a job in the UAE in his early twenties, the role was as assistant banquet manager. Yet in this position he was able to learn many of the crucial skills that have seen him rise through the ranks at Rotana.

Moving to Abu Dhabi in 1989, Kaddouri was organising banquets for Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan and learning the art of

negotiating with the rich and powerful. "The Abu Dhabi Hilton were the official caterers of the Mushrif Palace so when any politician or leader was coming over we would do the functions," says Kaddouri. "So I personally served Sheikh Zayed on multiple occasions and I remember the tables were lavishly filled because they were so generous. But Sheikh Zayed hardly ever ate anything. "It was an exciting time as I was only 23 and if you made a mistake you were in a lot of trouble. Many guys wouldn't want to leave their comfort zone for a position like that but it was an exciting thing for me. I wanted some adventure and in order to gain experience you have to go outside of your comfort zone. "And what I learnt that was to get business you had to use the personal touch. You had to be able to sit down and negotiate. I became much better at this and realised that care and attention was crucial."

After gaining yet more hotel experience in Malaysia as the food and beverage director at the renowned Shangri-La in Kuala Lumpur, Kaddouri moved away from the hotel business and decided to open up a bar in London. With the help of three friends, Match Bar opened in Clerkenwell and was soon voted bar of the year by a reputable newspaper. But the partnership didn't work and after a difficult departure, Kaddouri was left wondering what would come next. "I always say that good comes out of bad and following that I was approached to join Rotana," he says. "One of the main drivers for joining the company though was the chance to be involved in the company's growth, even in just the small way I was hired. "At the time it was as resident manager of the Al Bustan Rotana by the airport. I knew the general manager and knew that I wouldn't be micro-managed, and things happened from there. I started when we had four hotels and now we have 104, of which 60 are operating and the rest are under development. "We are opening 14 next year, and

This spread, clockwise: ART Rotana Bahrain; Guest room at Saadiyat Rotana Resort & Villas; Omer Kaddouri



have openings in Turkey and the Congo. We are starting to become more than a regional player. But I have been very fortunate with the things that have happened to me. My success has come through working with great colleagues, they have made me successful."

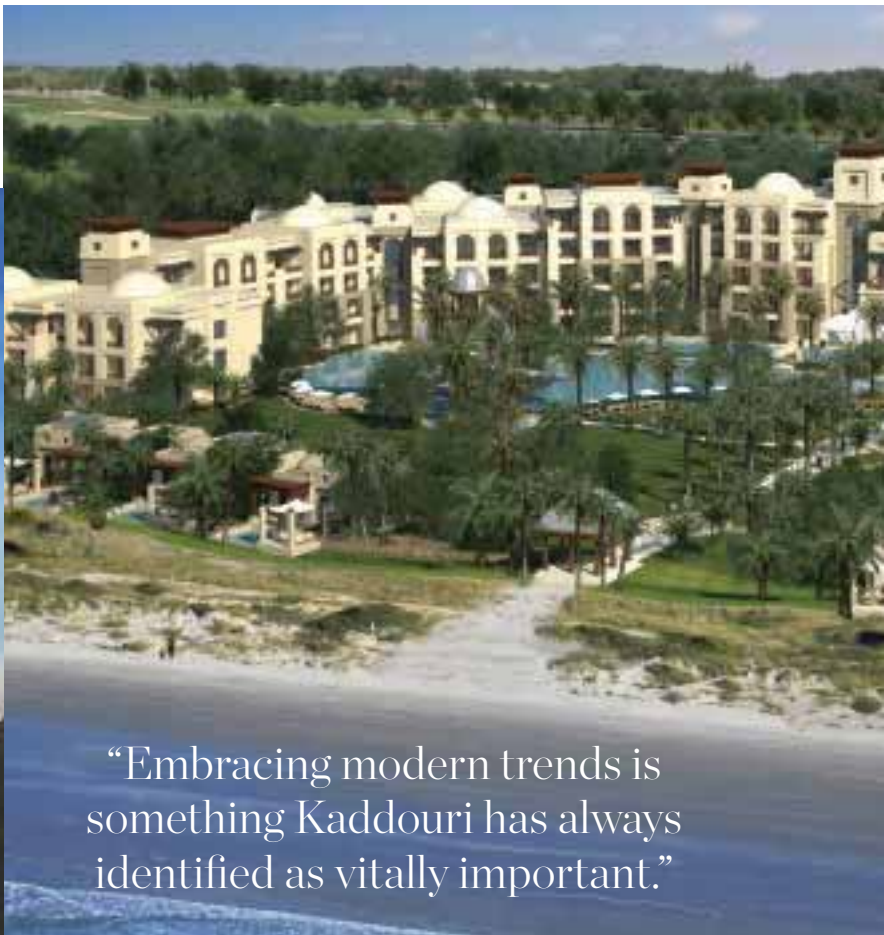
Rotana clearly saw potential in Kaddouri, even if he himself had little ambition to rise through the ranks. By 2008 he was in charge of 23 properties in his role as Senior Vice President of UAE Operations and in January 2014 was promoted to his current position as President and CEO. It has been a rapid rise for both Kaddouri and Rotana, especially given the competition in the Middle East and the global uncertainty that has negatively affected so many businesses in the region. Yet the company has continued to grow and thrive under the management of the British/Iranian hotelier. "Globally it is topsy-turvy, and it is difficult to forecast growth. But we have managed to maintain and even improve our market share. We are very proud of what we have done," he adds. "There is no doubt that competition raises standards and the level of service in this country is much higher than in Europe and the States. Asia is also fairly strong, but I think we are the strongest. "If you stay in a three, four or five-star hotel in this region, you won't only get better service and more attention, but you will probably be staying in a more sophisticated product. What we have maintained is a high level of hospitality. Especially when it comes to food and beverage."

Kaddouri has also readily embraced the influence of social media and the various platforms that make it so easy for customers to share positive and negative experiences. The likes of TripAdvisor and Booking.com can make or break the reputation of a hotel and Rotana have worked tirelessly to make sure that every single query is answered within 24 hours. This is largely thanks to the vision of Kaddouri who implemented an e-commerce team several years

## THE INTERVIEW

OMER KADDOURI

This spread, clockwise: Rotana Istanbul; Aerial view of Saadiyat Rotana Resort & Villas; Hamilton's Bar at Saadiyat Rotana; Rosso, ART Rotana; Omer Kaddouri; Amwaj Rotana Jumeirah Beach Residence



“Embracing modern trends is something Kaddouri has always identified as vitally important.”



ago. “It has become so important and yet so many companies don’t place importance on e-commerce managers,” says Kaddouri. “It was almost seven years ago that we started the Rotana.com committee in order to look at how people could book through our website. We knew it would be important and that work has paid off. “We also work hard to make sure we are satisfying customers and if they had a negative experience we have a 24-hour response protocol. We have to make sure we can respond, and we hope to bring that time down.”

Embracing modern trends is something Kaddouri has always identified as vitally important. With technology evolving so quickly, hotel chains can sometimes struggle to keep up with the latest developments. Yet despite Rotana being a relatively small company in comparison to many of the hotel chains present in the Middle East, they still have to make sure they are able to offer their guests the same experiences and the newest technology. This is why Kaddouri made the brave decision to stop charging guests for using the internet. “The revenue from the internet for a company of our size was important. But at the same time we felt people wouldn’t book with us anymore if they didn’t have free internet. So we made sure the broadband is at a strength where people will be happy. “We aren’t a multi-national hotel chain with thousands of hotels. We are a small to medium hotel chain so we don’t have the resources and research and development that the others guys have in terms of making our hotels so completely full of the latest technology. But we are where we need to be. “We are also seeing some large companies talking about having robots behind the reception desk, and robots for room service. That is a direction we don’t want to go to. We have to give the customer a real hotel experience. In so many hotels you are just a number, and that’s not hospitality.”

This statement goes a long way to explaining the success of Rotana. From the very top the company’s ethos is to deliver





exceptional service and that is through engaging with guests.

It is something Kaddouri learnt early in his career and it has stuck with him throughout. He readily admits to being an introvert in his personal life, but is an extrovert in business and has always strived to better understand different nationalities and cultures. "Everyone wants to be treated well and I like to think that is a strength of mine," says Kaddouri. "In one hotel there will be 30 or 40 nationalities so learning how to deal with people is so important. And for me the most important is to be empathetic. Not just on a cultural level, but also to their sensitivities and emotions. Everyone wants to be treated well. "If you build a hotel for a billion dollars and you have a general manager who doesn't understand people, whether that is customers or staff, that hotel is worth nothing." Caring for the customer is vitally important to Kaddouri and on too many occasions he has seen larger chains ignoring this simple mandate.

He spends much of his free time travelling with his wife and his two sons who are studying in Amsterdam. And by visiting rival hotel chains he has been able to identify both the mistakes they make and the areas in which they excel. He has also paid close attention to the rise of Airbnb and realises they could yet provide even more competition to the hotel industry. "They are another challenge," he states. "They are even buying building with apartments in them so they are also evolving and Airbnb is certainly growing annually in this region. But we are still managing to do lots of business and we will always learn and adapt."

Succeeding and adapting has much to do with the forward-thinking mind of Kaddouri, but ultimately he is still using the same lessons he learned when first starting out in the hospitality industry. And that is to "focus on making your customers happy". Rotana has been doing just that and is likely to continue to grow with that philosophy being passed down from the very top.

[www.rotana.com](http://www.rotana.com)



Words: Adrian Beck Images: Rotana

This spread, left-to-right: Unspoilt and private Oak Beach; Rainbow skink; Coral Sea vistas from Thala Beach Nature Reserve



# SECRETS OF THE FOREST

With its forest-cloaked bungalows, coconut-strewn beaches and orchestra of birds, Thala Beach Nature Reserve is a dream getaway in Australia's tropical northeast.

Leaving the dry, cold air of the plane for balmy tropical North Queensland was escapist enough. But now, driving through a coconut plantation leading to Thala Beach Nature Reserve, I feel like I'm somewhere truly exotic.

A smile, as sunny as the sky, beams from the open timber pavilion of the main lodge, holding a welcome tropical fruit cocktail. After checking in, an electric buggy journeys me down a slate path scattered with rainbow skinks, until I arrive at my bungalow.

## TIMBER HIDEAWAYS

I'm in the Sandpiper Suite, which stands on stilts, camouflaged in a forest cloaked in eucalypts, palms, grass trees and ferns. The advanced ecotourism-accredited, tree house-style hideaway comes in all shades of polished timber; from its floors and louvres to its coordinated wicker furniture. And when I throw open the doors to my timber-decked veranda, the rainforest meets the Coral Sea.

I head to dinner beneath the spectacular wooden roof of Osprey's Restaurant. Open-sided, it feels like the edge of the world overlooking the sea and the UNESCO World Heritage-listed mountains beyond.

The menu, designed by head chef, Matt Griffin, is most impressive. But having to make a decision between seared yellowfin tuna, sumac-dusted chicken breast with cous cous or the Kashmir-style lamb shoulder is tough! Choosing dessert, however, is a breeze: the Daintree chocolate nemesis with Davidson plum sorbet and pistachio tuille causes closed eyes and open sighs.

## FOREST RAMBLES

I awake to raindrops dancing across my roof, prompting a cacophony of tree frogs. Breakfast back at Osprey's is a feast, and not just for us guests. Dozens of raucous rainbow lorikeets are feeding in the trees. Their bright green, red and blue feathers are a work of art. And contrasted alongside them, with their red eyes and glossy dark bodies, are metallic starlings, here after their annual migration from Papua New Guinea.

Lace monitors, possums and sugar gliders make this diverse forest their home. And of the 800 native bird species found in Australia, 200 of them have been documented across Thala's 58 hectares. In the hope of spotting some, I join amiable ranger, David Anderson.

Setting off, we identify an olive-backed sunbird building its nest—downward! Constructed like a long beard hanging from a branch, it sways, crocheted with twigs, grasses and stolen spider webs. We then see a large-billed gerygone (or flood bird) atop a strangler fig.

"It builds its nest only over water to prevent access from predators such as snakes," David says. From a Cedar Bay cherry bearing unripe fruit, appears a noisy friarbird. This member of the honeyeater family sports a bald leather-like head and curved beak.

Wings of the non-feathered kind also catch our eye. The three main types of butterfly in this area are the red lacewing, the iridescent blue Ulysses and the Cairns birdwing (Australia's largest), with its striking green and black wings. But today, rustic butterflies flit in and out of the clearing, performing aerial



This spread, clockwise: The fruit of life; Thala's verdant coconut grove; Thala Beach Eucalypt Bungalow; A rainbow lorikeet ruckus; A stand of foxtail palms; Secret rock pools; Oak Beach.



“Dozens of raucous rainbow lorikeets are feeding in the trees. Their bright green, red and blue feathers are a work of art.”

acrobatics in a kaleidoscope of oranges.

“Captain Cook sailed this way aboard his Endeavour in 1770, collecting butterflies,” says David. “The clearwing swallowtail (or ‘big greasy’), was initially thought to be two different types, but upon closer analysis, it was discovered that they were in fact male and female.” The male bears black spots on its front wings, and the female resembles brown greaseproof paper.

We reach Oak Beach at the foot of the property. The private 2km-long stretch of sand is pocked with the holes of nocturnal crabs and fallen coconuts. And between the casuarinas and coconut palms sway hammocks bearing bodies that have abandoned the concept of time.

Beside a rare patch of littoral rainforest backing the beach, we pass a 300 year-old melaleuca tree. Nearby, layers of bracket fungi cling to a fallen trunk like slices of dried orange. Traditionally, bracket fungus was used by Aboriginal people, who would chew it to treat mouth ulcers and infections.

Out comes David's telescope. Through the high-powered lens, we view the back of a Papuan frogmouth sitting in a paperbark tree. “This is a rare sight as these birds camouflage expertly and are quiet flyers,” David tells us. Listening to the sounds of nature, he identifies the golden oriole's laser-like call, before a butcherbird whistles and gargles.

Heading into the palm grove, we find clusters of foxtail, alexander and weeping cabbage palms—the hearts of which were eaten by early European settlers. The livistona fan palms here were planted by David 10 years ago, and as a tropical shower rains down, we take shelter beneath their protective fronds.





Walking between the drops, we reach an enormous mound of leaf litter that's been built and maintained over 20 years. Upon it is a clucking orange-footed scrub fowl, part of the megapod family. Within the mound, the female lays a clutch of up to 12 enormous eggs (up to 20% of the bird's weight). The male incubates them, regulating the temperature to within 1°C by adding or removing leaves. The chicks hatch after six weeks, taking two days to dig their way to the surface.

### ON THE COCONUT TRAIL

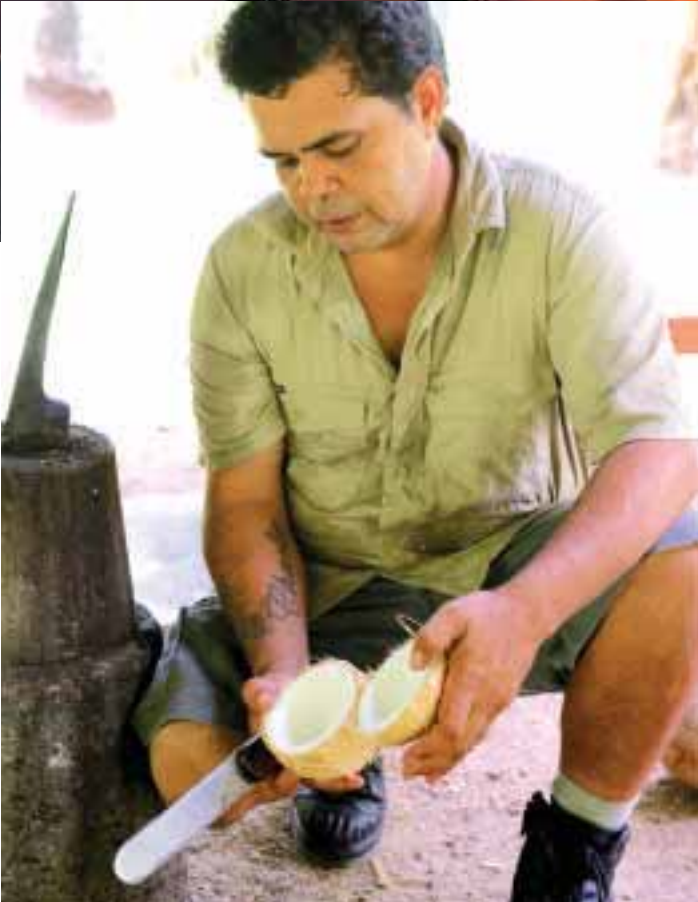
The following morning I meet Napari Tunsted, our Torres Strait Islander guide, for a Coconut Odyssey tour. "There are 700 coconut palms on the grounds of Thala," he begins. "And of the world's 150 varieties, 15 of them grow here."

We learn that coconuts are not a nut, but a fruit, the centre of which starts out with a translucent jelly-like substance. After five months, it begins to thicken and harden. When mature at 12 months, it falls.

Napari cuts open some young coconuts with a cake knife (adding an umbrella for the fun of it) and hands them out to our group. "Highly nutritious, they offer a perfect balance of rehydrating electrolytes, provide multiple vitamins and minerals essential to health, are rich in medium-chain triglycerides (healthy fats), and are anti-viral and anti-bacterial," says Napari. "And their oil is still used for gum-pulling in Ayurveda." The sweet, subtle nectar is utterly delicious.

Napari then uses a coconut shredder to extract the flesh of a six-month-old coconut while telling us that to Pacific





This spread, clockwise: Thala Beach Nature Reserve at dusk; Secret rock pools; An orange-footed scrub fowl; Osprey's Restaurant; A wallaby; The Sandpiper Suite's secluded location; Napari cracks open a coconut



“Then comes the crunching of leaves, and out pokes a twitching nose and furry ears. The wild wallaby is one of around 50 that roam the property.”

Islanders, the coconut palm is the tree of life. “You can eat it, drink it, weave it, shape it into bowls, and line floor and roofs with it. Plus, it makes great firewood.”

Next, Napari smashes a younger coconut down onto a metal spike, retrieving the flesh to shred it, and extract the milk. The taste and texture of the dried slices, are similar to that of a pear.

Impressively, the owner of Thala sewed this coconut plantation himself. He collected the coconuts from Cow Bay, just north of the Daintree River, put them on the ground, and here today flourishes this bountiful grove.

On my last morning, I rise at 5am and head to Thala's waterhole. I'm promised a wildlife sighting. There's not a soul nor sound around, but I wait. And wait. All I can hear is the breeze rustling the leaves, and the distant cackle of a kookaburra. Then comes the crunching of leaves, and out pokes a twitching nose and furry ears. The wild wallaby is

one of around 50 that roam the property. Spotting me, it halts. Both of us remain as still as statues, hardly taking a breath. Eventually deciding that I'm not a threat, it begins to feed on the grasses until my camera shutter clicks, propelling it back into the bushes.

The hot and steamy walk back to my villa is derailed by a tiered swimming pool with a romantic grotto. From there, I head to the secret rock pool down the hill. In I plunge to enjoy the crisp refreshment of its mini waterfall, while listening to the bonging of out-of-sight frogs.

Post sunset, I join a cultural presentation in the main lodge, led by elders from the local Kuku Yalanji people. There is a moving didgeridoo performance, a sharing of bush tucker knowledge, and a talk on Aboriginal culture and traditions that have been carried on through the generations for 50,000 years. It's a fitting end to my stay, as Thala, along with its landscapes, walks and wildlife, is in essence, timeless.



“Home to some of the world’s most highly lauded spas, natural spring waters sourced from the inner elements of the earth and the finest of gastronomy. Vaud is heaven on earth and the land of wellness.”

Chillon Castle





# The pursuit of *wellness*

It is hard to ignore a place that has been graced by the star-studded type for centuries on end. A place that gave inspiration to the likes of Coco Chanel, Prince, Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky, Audrey Hepburn, Charlie Chaplin and the like. Feeding their minds with the inspiration they needed when creating their next masterpiece.

A place that has also been visited by troves of celebrities on their quest for ever-lasting youth and beauty along with the Russian oligarchs, New York bankers and maharajahs who chose this place to spend their summer vacations.

So what is it that attracts these fortunate folk to the shores of Lake Geneva, in the Swiss canton of Vaud? Apart from, of course, its fairy-tale backdrop of snow-capped Alps and the ever-serene crystal-clear waters of Lake Geneva.

Having been blessed enough to visit, I've come to the conclusion that it is all in the quest of one quality, that being 'the pursuit of wellness'.

Wellness, according to the dictionary, is the state of being healthy in the body and mind, especially as the result of deliberate effort. It is true that many places dotted around the globe offer wellness in body or wellness in mind, but indeed it is rare to find a land that offers both.

Home to some of the world's most highly lauded spas, renowned for holding the secrets to ever-lasting beauty, natural spring waters sourced from the inner elements of the earth and the finest of gastronomy. Indeed, Vaud is heaven on earth and the land of wellness.

### SECRET TO EVER-LASTING BEAUTY

Any conversation involving the 'secret to youth' with the name Dr Pfulg as part of the sentence and you can be rest assured you are in the right place. Considered one of the top five cosmetic surgeons in the world, there is good reason as to why Montreux, one of Vaud's scenic lakeside towns, has become a surgical tourism hub thanks to Pfulg's highly regarded reputation at Laclinic Montreux (laclinic.ch).

Further along the lake, Clinique La Prairie (laprairie.ch), a lakeside fortress is famed for its treatment, 'Revitalisation', a rejuvenation therapy, which originally involved injections of live cells extracted from lamb foetuses. Having claimed to reduce cell division and slow down the ageing process, CLP Extract is now taken from the livers, instead of the foetuses of black lambs. How considerate...

However, rest assured it's not all looks and body image in this game of wellness in the Canton of Vaud. Rather, the palace hotels tucked along the lake certainly help to lift the mood, especially when opening the French doors of your suite to your lakeside view.

One place to try is Les Trois Couronnes, (hoteltroiscouronnes.ch) the first and only hotel in the world to offer skin treatments from renowned biologist and dermatologist to many of Paris' chic set, Joëlle Ciocco. Famed for her Sculpture Massage, this 'magician of the skin' performs a technique often likened to skin gymnastics, which involves stretching the mask of muscle over the face.

Alternatively, stay at the Beau Rivage Palace (brp.ch) and enjoy its luxurious spa - a favourite haunt for Queen Rania of Jordan. Need I say more?

### SLOW TRAVEL – TAKE TIME TO PONDER

Wellness is not all about body, rather the health of the mind is just as important. Fortunately, there is a 'grassroots wellness movement' that has quietly emerged as a solution to tourist burnout, that being slow travel. And Vaud has mastered it to a fine art. Slow travel is about taking in one's surroundings to come to know a destination more intimately—more thoughtfully and with all five senses. This might involve taking a leisurely walking tour, a bike ride across the countryside or traveling by train to enjoy the landscape. Even a visit to the Olympic Museum which rests upon the shores of the calming lake.

For 'Vaudites' this style of travel has become their everyday life. Morning times are welcomed by locals running along the lakeside shores. The smiles on their faces making you wonder whether the phrase 'skip in their step' originated from here. Corporate folk, robed in their finest suits, whiz by on their scooters as they skate to work with a merry 'bonjour' as they pass. Cyclists too, seem to be revelling in an inner joy.

As a tourist, you can choose to do all of the above, plus board one of Vaud's two belle époque style of transports, the famed train or paddle-steamer.

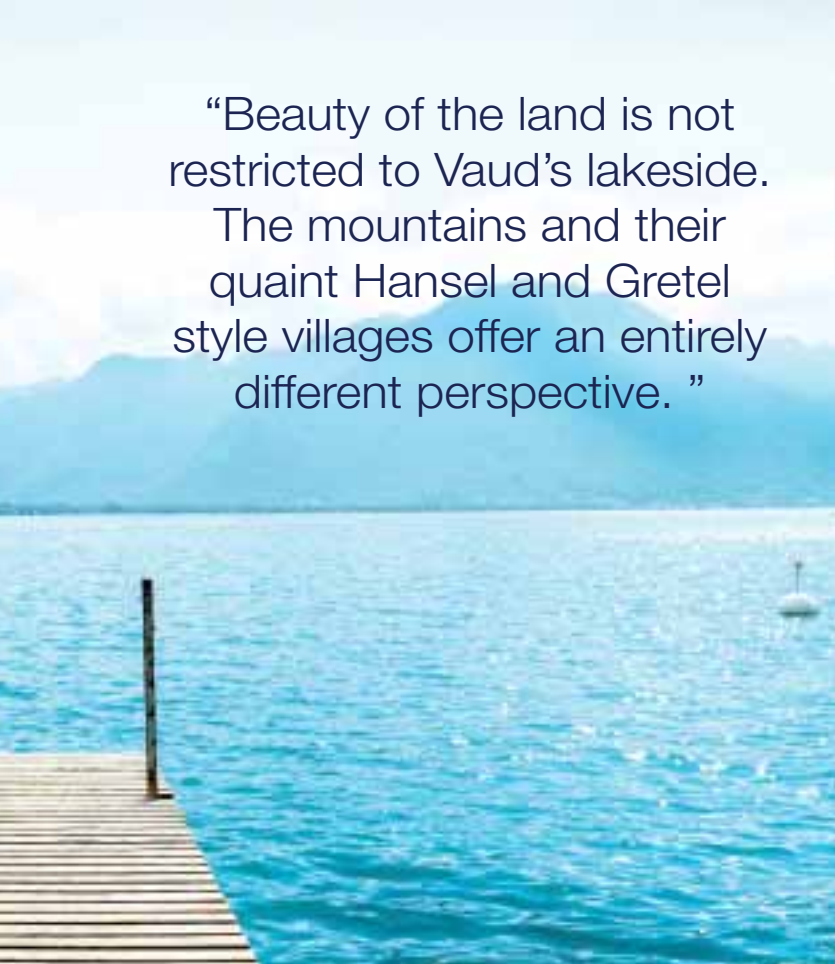
A slow travellers' paradise, relaxing on-board one of the belle époque paddle steamers (cgn.ch); an elegant fleet of side-wheel paddleboats built in the earlier part of the 19th century, is quite frankly, slow travel at its finest. Surrounded by polished wood, brass and by-gone glamour, an afternoon can easily be spent whiling away the hours whilst enjoying a five-course meal as you immerse yourself in Vaud's magical surroundings – sailing from one side of the lake to the other. From chic Lausanne to the sources of Evian a little further afield.

The prettiest part of the lake is the trip from Lausanne to Montreux, where the lakeshore is designated to a UNESCO World Heritage site for one special reason, its vineyard. Known as Lavaux,





This page, clockwise: Cathedral; Bellvue; Peak Walk by Tissot; Les Trois Couronnes breakfast room; Lake at Montreux; La Clinic Montreux.



“Beauty of the land is not restricted to Vaud’s lakeside. The mountains and their quaint Hansel and Gretel style villages offer an entirely different perspective.”

and dating back to the 11th century, every possible square inch supports cascading terraces of vines, 10,000 to be exact. It’s the perfect backdrop to sail out to Chateau de Chillon, Switzerland’s grandest of castles. It’s also the perfect setting to enjoy one of Vaud’s traditional dishes, fillet de perch. A delicious fish caught straight from the lake you are sailing upon.

Beauty of the land is not concentrated to Vaud’s lakeside pursuits. Rather the mountains and their quaint Hansel and Gretel style villages offer an entirely different perspective. The best way to access these picturesque mountain villages is onboard one of the belle époque replica trains ([goldenpass.ch](http://goldenpass.ch)), which depart from Montreux - a delight for railway nostalgia enthusiasts or quite frankly anyone who enjoys a spectacular view.

### ACTIVE PURSUITS – A WINTER PLAYGROUND

Whilst venturing into the mountains it is hard to ignore the plethora of active wellness pursuits on offer. One place to visit is Glacier 3000 ([glacier3000.ch](http://glacier3000.ch)), an alpine playground of all things fun. Winter adventurers love swooping down the ski and snowboard runs, bumping along the toboggan paths or posing for the ultimate selfie whilst walking across the Tissot Peak Walk, a unique suspension bridge connecting two mountain peaks.

### CAPITAL OF GASTRONOMY

‘Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food’, Hippocrates. Now, there are a few angles one can take on this quote by the

## WORLD TRAVELLER

This page: Anne-Sophie Pic; Anne-Sophie Pic's Plat taurines; Le Fairmont Montreux Palace.



ancient Greek physician. Eating for health, yes. Eating for pleasure, I guess that depends on just how 'pleasurable' (and as a result wicked) the food is.

One thing for sure is that Vaud is the land of pleasurable food and the gastronomy here is, nothing short of, impeccable. In fact, it is an unmissable destination for foodies, demonstrated by the record number of restaurants awarded stars, toques, and flowers.

A must-have experience is the gastronomy of three Michelin-starred Anne-Sophie Pic, and the first woman to be voted chef of the year by the Michelin too, who supervises proceedings at the gourmet restaurant of the Beau-Rivage Palace Hotel. Furthermore, Edgard Bovier, who serves his food in the opulent setting of the Lausanne Palace & Spa, one of Coco Chanel's old haunts.

Further down the lake in the town, Vevey, host to the fascinating Chaplin's World - a museum set up in the late actor's lakeside mansion. The town is the birthplace of milk chocolate and a chocolate lover's paradise, offering chocolate workshops, tastings and all things associated with that delicious russet hued powder.

## MUSIC

They say music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination and life to everything. That was certainly the case for Prince and Freddie Mercury who were known to reside for months on end in Vaud whilst recording some of their greatest tracks.

It is here, where the famous Montreux Jazz Festival fills the streets and hotels with fine harmonies and worldly classics that entertain the knowledgeable crowds, each summer. No wonder, hotels such as Le Fairmont Montreux Palace ([fairmont.com/montreux](http://fairmont.com/montreux)), famously named their most elite suites after Jazz legends, and why many private jam sessions continue until after dark on its private terraces and in the bar. A must is to join one of the dine and music cruises. Several times during the Festival, crazily animated boats weigh anchor in the afternoon to get the public swaying and dancing on the lake to live salsa, jazz, blues, or samba – a unique way to dive even deeper into the idyllic wellness of Vaud's setting.

And so with music to the ears, the finest of medical retreats to nip and tuck, majestic alpine surroundings and the finest of slow travel, there is indeed no other place to discover for that pursuit of wellness. Vaud, you pretty gem – you have it all.

[lake-geneva-region.ch](http://lake-geneva-region.ch)

Words: Laura Snook



# This is what we call a happy stopover.

Come to the place where a morning walk is taken along a white sand beach, and exercise is rolling a paddle through crystal clear waters. It's not hard to see why Fijians are such happy people, and it's not hard to be just as happy as they are. For more information please visit [www.fiji.travel](http://www.fiji.travel)





# A TASTE OF *the wild*

Enjoy a curated African tour with Sophie Ibbotson, as she takes us on a culinary safari

“You ate what?!”

The voice screeched from the other end of the phone.

I winced, repeated myself, and paused. There was a brief silence, and then: “Did you catch it yourself?”

There are many things I’d do in a bid for a good story but wrestling a crocodile to death isn’t one of them, even if I were modelling myself on Lara Croft. I suppose it was a fair enough question: how else would crocodile ceviche get onto my dinner plate?

An African safari is the ultimate wildlife adventure. But just because you’re investing in solitude, in remoteness, doesn’t mean you want to give up your creature comforts whilst you’re appreciating the great outdoors. Thankfully a new generation of ultra-luxurious lodges and camps has cottoned onto this fact. I travelled with safari connoisseurs Africa Exclusive to southern Africa to taste, literally and metaphorically, exactly what they have in store.

The infamous crocodile made its appearance on the menu at the Matetsi River Lodge, a stylish, contemporary property on the banks of the Zambezi River in Zimbabwe. It was dark in the garden and I read the menu by lantern light. The crocodile immediately stood out.

I had, in honesty, no idea of how crocodile might taste. I was intrigued by the culinary possibility, but must admit that there was also a darker side. Day after day I’d watched the crocodile in the

river, and felt intimidated, even at a distance. I’d watched them tearing the limbs off antelope, and snapping away at birds. Every safari guide had issued the same warning: Do not drag your hand in the water. If a crocodile is lurking beneath the surface, he’ll drag you under and you’ll die. In a world where you’ll either be the predator or the prey, I wanted to be at the top of the food chain. That crocodile didn’t stand a chance. And very tasty he was, too!

Anti-poaching initiatives are essential to the survival of Africa’s already-vulnerable wildlife, and responsible lodges and camps rightly won’t undermine them by serving bush-meat. That includes crocodile. So whilst I might have fantasised that my dinner came straight from the waters of the Zambezi, in fact it will have been farmed like any other meat.

Matetsi is accessible by road year-round, and though being in Zimbabwe inevitably imposes some restrictions on a chef’s creativity, you wouldn’t have known it from menu. What they don’t have to contend with, however, is being completely cut off: which poses serious logistical challenges.

Botswana’s remote Gomoti Plains Camp is run with military precision. Behind the scenes, away from guests’ eyes, an army of staff goes to superhuman levels to ensure every meal served is perfect. Organisation here is key.

Once a month a six-wheel-drive vehicle makes the arduous 80 km journey from Maun, the closest town. On-board are supplies of

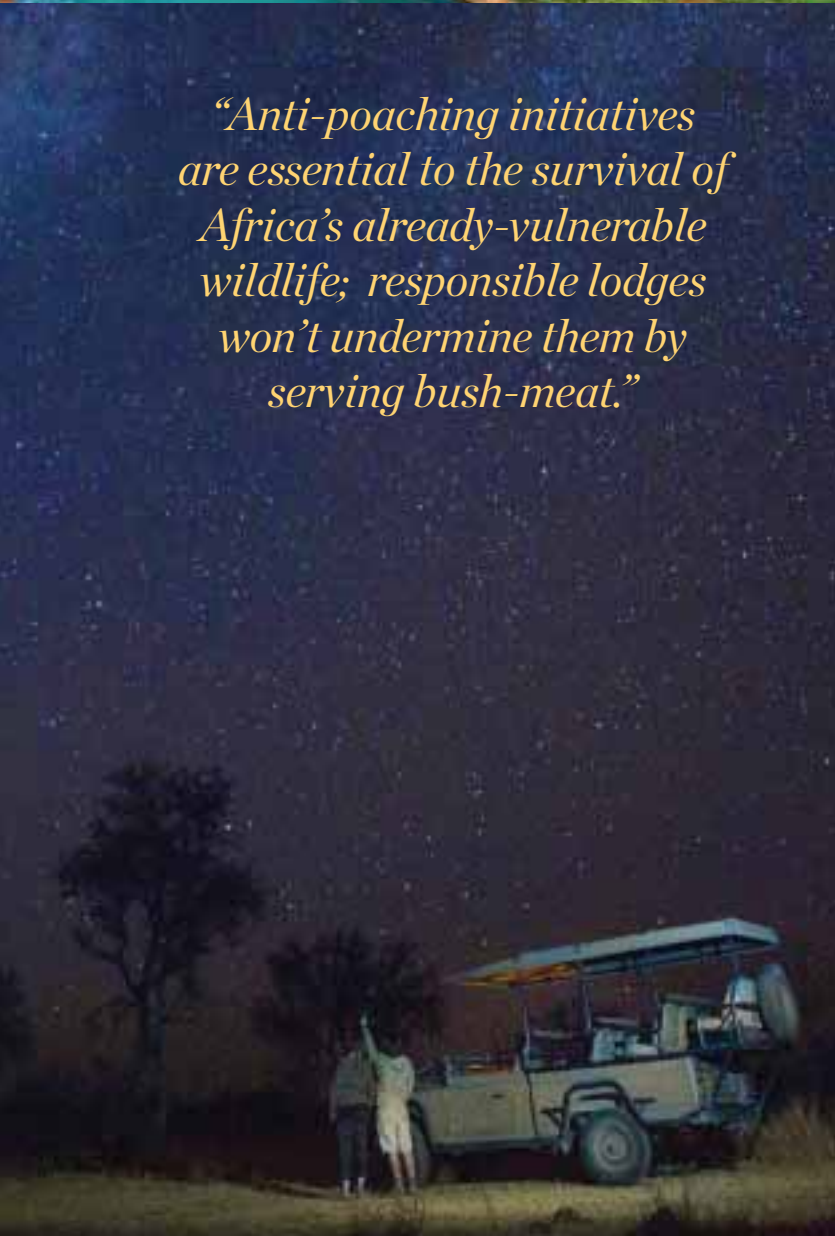
This spread, clockwise: Matetsi River Lodge and Zambezi River; Gomoti Plains aerial view; Machaba camp night sky; Matetsi river lodge suite at dusk; Matetsi river lodge suite interior; Crocodile entering river.

dried goods, tins, bottles, and cans. A weekly flight brings a tonne of fish, meat, and fresh fruit and vegetables, goods which simply won't last. Store manager Lydia runs a tight ship and knows exactly where everything goes. Her walk-in cool store is lined in charcoal and has an effective natural drip system; the fridge, freezer, and reverse osmosis system all run off solar power. The heat isn't the only threat to these precious ingredients, though: the kitchen and stores have to have a substantial wire fence around them to keep the hyena out. I bet Gordon Ramsay never has to take that precaution!

At Gomoti Plains the pièce de résistance is not a single dish but a complete culinary experience: a surprise bush party a short



*“Anti-poaching initiatives are essential to the survival of Africa’s already-vulnerable wildlife; responsible lodges won’t undermine them by serving bush-meat.”*



**GOURMET TRAVELLER**  
TASTE THE WILD

*“Until this point my experience of bonfire cooking was limited to jacket potatoes baked in the embers; Gomoti’s chefs have significantly higher standards.”*



distance away from the camp. Returning after dark from a game drive, and feeling decidedly peckish, we caught sight of firefly-like lights in the trees. Drawing closer, not only the trees but also the termite mounds were adorned with lanterns, and a roaring bonfire gave off additional light and heat.

Until this point my experience of bonfire cooking was limited to jacket potatoes baked in the embers, and somewhat charred marshmallow on sticks. Gomoti’s chefs, I’m delighted to say, have significantly higher standards.

To start with, the staff erupted in to song, the warm a cappella of their voices pushing powerfully through the night air. Individual dancers, strutting their best moves, got even the least coordinated of guests shaking their booty to the music. We were carried away in a rhythmic conga line to a beautifully laid table, lantern lit and set with silver and fine china atop a crisp white cloth. Chicken kebabs, slow-cooked kudu (farmed antelope), and homemade bread have never tasted so good as they did that night beneath the stars.

A spectacle like that can only work in a very specific setting; elsewhere a simpler approach is more fitting. Zambia’s Musekese Camp is tiny, intimate, and hidden amongst the trees in a private concession in the Kafue National Park. Founded by conservationists Phil and Tyrone, Musekese caters for guests who still want to feel







Left to right: Matetsi game drive drink stop; Suite at andbeyond matetsi river; Machaba camp dining; Lounge area overlooking the zambezi; Dhow on the Lake Malawi; Gomoti Plains View Sunset.



they're in the wilderness. And they are.

I'd eaten quite a few slices of Chef Kapaipi's banana bread, courgette cake, and date loaf before I ventured over to his kitchen, hidden in the trees behind the main camp building. At home my cakes rarely rise, and I always blame the oven. From now on, that excuse just won't do.

Kapaipi bakes his cakes — and fresh bread — in a hole in the ground. He's dug out a shallow pit and capped it with a thin sheet of metal. The heat source is short sticks of wood, and when the oven is up to temperature, Kapaipi lifts off the lid, puts his filled loaf tins inside, then shuts the lid back down. It's a testament to his prowess as a chef that every bread roll, every cake, that he serves is perfectly risen and golden brown. Afternoon tea is a real luxury in the bush, and with such effort required to create it, I wanted to savour every morsel.

On safari you really do appreciate every single culinary detail: perhaps it's all that fresh air which makes you hungry, and the heat certainly builds up a thirst. Freshly ground coffee and squeezed seasonal juices often put in an appearance at the breakfast table, refreshingly, but the drink everyone looks forward to most is the daily sundowner.

The sundowner, as the name suggests, is the drink you



## GOURMET TRAVELLER

### TASTE THE WILD



Left to right: Machaba camp; Lake Malawi; Chef Kapaipi baking a cake; Stirfry at Musekese Camp

consume as the sun goes down. Lodges compete to outdo each other in the drama of the locations they choose, and in the quality of beverages and snacks.

At Pumulani, which clings to a hillside overlooking Lake Malawi, a wooden dhow (traditional sailing boat) is moored on the beach. An hour before sunset, I clambered aboard and the crew set sail out into the lake. With sandy beaches, waves, and water stretching to the horizon you'd be forgiven for thinking you were at sea, but it is certainly a lake.

The cool box was definitely TARDIS-like. Out of it came not

## Dining highlights

Southern Africa's safari destinations are much less visited than those in East Africa, but you sacrifice nothing in terms of game viewing, guiding, or lodges. In fact, you get much more for your money!

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Matetsi River Lodge, Zimbabwe  
Gomoti Plains Camp, Botswana  
Musekese Camp, Zambia  
Pumulani, Malawi

only all manner of bottles and cans, but slices of citrus fruit, ice, and savoury pastries, too. I took a glass in one hand, the liquid wonderfully crisp and cold in contrast to the humidity of the air around me. As the sun sank, the sky turned from blue to yellow to burnt orange, and even the lake seemed to glow.

Travelling across Southern Africa, eating uncountable meals in a dozen properties, I tried to work out what it was about certain chefs that made their food and drink unforgettable. I concluded that the ingredients in their recipe — fresh, seasonal ingredients, the beauty of the great outdoors, things which catch you by surprise — might be simple, but their methods require patience, imagination, and skill. The Food and Travel team visited Southern Africa with bespoke safari specialist Africa Exclusive. [safari.co.uk](http://safari.co.uk).

Words: Sophie Ibbotson. Images: Ben Tavener, Food&Travel & iStock



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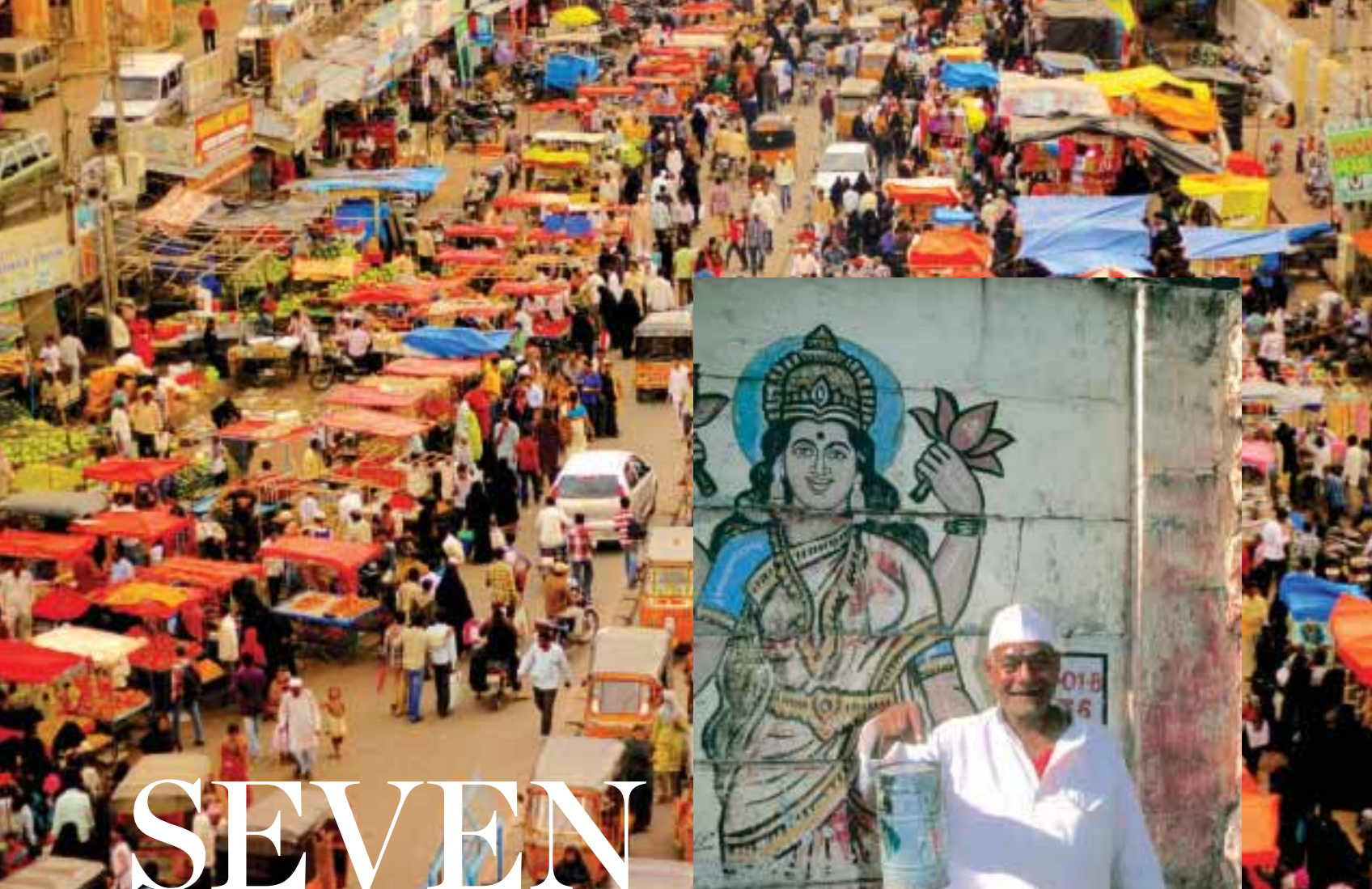


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# SEVEN SEAS OF WRY

Food and Travel columnist Kevin Pilley meets Mumbai's legendary Dabbawallahs

“Babu” has worked with “Hercules” for nearly forty years. They are an inseparable partnership.

Despite their growing ricketiness, “Babu” and his “1968 Raleigh Hercules” touring bicycle have together clocked up over one hundred and fifty thousand miles, pedalling the congested main streets and equally chaotic backstreets of Mumbai for a living.

“Babu” is a professional “Dabbawallah” and member of the city’s “Honourable Company of Tiffin Box Carriers”. He is seventy-years-old and, with the help of his trusty thirty-something two-wheeler, still rides twenty miles in a normal working day. He leaves home at 5am and returns at 9pm.

“Dabbas are the metallic lunch-boxes we collect from private homes all around the city. We collect them from wives, mothers, grandmothers, daughters or nieces and deliver them every working day to their male relatives at their workplace,” says Baba as he waits for his train to arrive at “Grant Road” railway station.

It is rush-hour and the city is a blizzard of people. Old Bombay is in its usual state of endearing bedlam.

“Dabbas” are one of the most common sights in the city. If you know what to look for! The men with cans tied to every part of their bicycle.

In Marathi or Hindi “dabba” means “box”. “Dabbas” are aluminium steel cans containing typical Indian food items like rice, dhal (lentils), “chana bhatura” (deep-fried chickpeas, roti and chapatti bread.



Some contain fish like pomfret and snapper. Some salad. Some buttermilk or yoghurt. Even pasta and pizza.

The “Dabbawallahs” are the biggest food delivery relay system in the world. They “FedEx” food around Mumbai. But by foot.

Says Babu who is a third generation tiffin-box carrier: “It is one of the oldest catering concerns in the world. I am very proud to be a member of such a great and unique institution. It is a great honour to serve this great city as a lunch-pail boy.”

The tradition of carrying lunch boxes from private homes to workplaces dates back to 1890. Shri Mahadev Dube was its pioneer. He used to deliver light lunches to the offices of “Britishers” who lived away from their places of employment. In those days everything was delivered by bicycle, hand-cart, “tanga” (horse-drawn carriage) and even bullock. Maharashtra migrant Mahadeo Havaji Bachahe picked up on the idea and developed it.

Today, the trains serving Mumbai’s sprawling suburbs provide the main method of transport. Along with old-fashioned pedal power. The service criss-crosses the city of 12 million people in a complex cat’s cradle of routes by which the boxes are collected in the morning from the doorsteps of private homes and delivered straight to desk in downtown offices. Sometimes one tiffin box can travel sixty kilometres one way. The boxes are collected again at 2.30 and delivered for collection the next day.

Clockwise: The streets of Mumbai; Dabbawallahs on the train; Dabbawallahs ready to go; Dabbas



*“The tradition of carrying lunch boxes from private homes to workplaces dates back to 1890.”*

“It is military precision. It’s all about co-ordination and teamwork,” said Babu introducing his friend and colleague Dhondu.

“In Mumbai the Dabbawallahs are the kings of the road,” said Dhondu. “We are here to serve all Mumbaikars. Our customers are everyone from oil executives on Nariman Point and the money men of the Stock Exchange to normal people. Normal everyday workers.

“We are the lifeblood of the city. We feed the city.”

This unique food distribution system is very labour-intensive and determinedly low-tech although text messaging is becoming more popular. Some Dabbawallahs have even been known to wear advertisements; becoming mobile billboards.

Dabbawallahs are not technically employed but stakeholders in a charity. In effect they are independent small-scale entrepreneurs. When they join they make a donation which guarantees them a monthly salary of approximately 5,000 rupees as well as a degree of healthcare and education for their children. It is a job for life. There are a few women food couriers, “Moushi”.

“I have 6,000 miles on my body clock already this year” laughed Dhondu. Babu raised his eyebrows sceptically.

Every year the Dabbawallahs leave Mumbai for Jejuri to attend the Hawan religious festival. Dabbawallahs are originally from Pune in Maharashtra. Many worship Vithoba of Pandharpur and do their own charity work, providing funding for “Dharmashalas” (cheap accommodation) at the pilgrimage places like Bhimashankar, Alandi, Jejuri and Pandharpur.

All the Dabbawallahs may be vegetarian Hindus but their customers are Muslim, Sikh, Jain or Parsi. It is important that the right lunch is delivered to the right person. And, quite extraordinarily, 999 times out of 1,000 it is. They deliver between 170,000-200,000 lunches every day and charge around \$10 a month for the service which started with the growth in migratory workers.

Mumbai’s Dabbawallahs caters for a need. People still want traditional homemade food and home cooking. Variants on the idea – although small scale- have begun among the south Asian populations of San Francisco and New York.

One tiffin can change hands as many as ten times before reaching its final destination. Babu knows all the short-cuts. He knows the quickest way to get across Mumbai. His is a respected profession. “No one steals the bicycles of Dabbawallahs. They know that they still be stealing our jobs and our livelihood. But most of us have a spare one just in case.”

There are now 4,000 professional “Dabbawallahs” operating every day in Mumbai. Continues Babu: “It is still cheaper for our customers to pay for food to be collected from their homes or homes of loved ones and deliver it to them at work rather than go to a restaurant or a street stall every day.”

The tradition of “tiffin” (possibly deriving from the Arabic “Tafunnan” meaning “diversion” or Chinese “ch’ih-fan” to eat rice) comes from south India especially Tamil Nadu where it refers to an in-between-meals snack. Roadside stalls advertise “Tiffin Ready” It is customary to offer guests a “tiffin” as a courtesy when they visit a Tamil household. Babu delivers about fifty lunchboxes a day. As many as he can carry.

Every “dabba” is colour and number coded. Babu pointed to one and explained.

“K-BO-10-19/A/15. K is the identity letter of the wallah or carrier. BO means Borivali i.e. the area from where the tiffin is to be collected. The figure of 10 refers to Nariman point area. 19/A/15 refers to the 19th Building and the 15th floor in Nariman point area where the tiffin is to be delivered. Easy! Simple!”

Another friend arrived laden down with home-cooked lunches. He had come from Cobala district. They swapped boxes. Babu delivered his last tiffin box right on time to an office block in Virar. He had about an hour before he started collecting.

“The old ways are the best,” he smiled collapsing exhausted over the handlebars of his “Hercules”.

“It is a privilege to be part of a century-old tradition. The finest and most famous meals on wheels service in the world.”

# FOOD: LIVING, LOVING, REMEMBERING, WRITING

For many food is at the heart of not only their family life but also their culture; Anthea Rowan discovers how food, life, passion and the written word have become intertwined





Left to right: Japanese celebrity chef and restaurateur Nobu Matsuhisa; American chef Julia Child; Chocolate Swiss Roll; Chocolate Cake.

Soft, smooth, saffron-yellow dahl scantily salted and proffered on a spoon by her doting ayah: my mother's first food memory and one which roots her firmly to India where she was born in big, bustling Bombay. The dahl has remained a dish she's loved, the ayah whom she also loved taught her to speak Hindi, which she forgot long ago. Mum recalls little of her formative years on the subcontinent but she does remember that: comfort food and love. M F K Fisher who published her memoir, *The Gastronomical Me*, in 1943 wrote, 'The first thing I remember tasting and then wanting to taste again is the grayishpink fuzz my grandmother skimmed from a spitting kettle of strawberry jam. I suppose I was about four.' Famous restaurateur Nobu Matsuhisa, whose book *Nobu* will hit the shelves in November, writes that his earliest memories are accompanied by a backing track of kitchen noises: rattling utensils and knives

*“The way we cook and eat, our whole attitude to food, is bound with memories that sustain and nourish the way we cook for our partners, our children, our friends.”*

slicing deftly against a wooden chopping board. The *Comfort Food Diaries: My Quest for the Perfect Dish to Mend a Broken Heart*, due for publication late September, is Emily Nunn's endeavour to journey her way back to wholeness and happiness following the death of her brother and almost simultaneously being ditched by her partner as she cooks her way through memories and meals with friends and family.

Food, imperative to life is so often accompanied by that essential Other: Love It's hard to separate them. Nurture and nourishment. Small wonder Julia Child is quoted as saying, 'Dining with one's friends and beloved family is certainly one of life's primal and most innocent delights, one that is both soulsatisfying and eternal'

If I consider the food of my own childhood, I remember cooking with my mother and the sense of occasion that attended these sessions. The planning: when would we cook: always in the

afternoon, to prod the slow hours of the day onward. What would we cook: something sweet, to eat for afternoon tea, something that required collaboration, team-work. We, mum, my younger brother and much later my little sister and I, would pore over cookery books, elbows on kitchen counters, us children standing on upturned bottle crates to gain some height. We liked to look at the pictures in Katie Stewart's *Cooking Better All the Time*, which was interleaved with recipes that mum has ripped out of *Good Housekeeping*, feasting our eyes on Devil's Food Cake and Strawberry Gateau, Chocolate Swiss Roll and Cherry Russe all enthroned on ornate cake stands dressed with doilies (it was the seventies, after all) and back lit with violet lights. We never made any of those things. It was the connection that was important, the closeness, the opportunity to talk, 'Why's it called Devil's Food Mum? Temptation, she said.

What's a Russe? How come we don't have cake plates like that?'

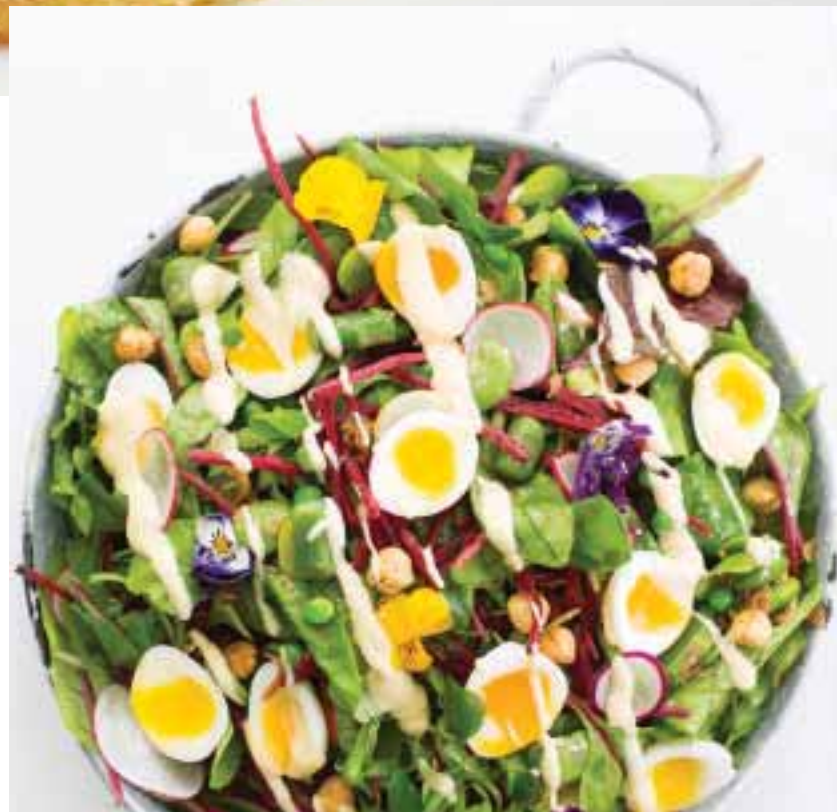
The perfectly ordinary and perfect chocolate cakes we baked with my mother were an exercise in diligent division of labours: my role was to measure ingredients using an old cast weighing scales, watching for the precise balance, adding or removing a single spoon of sugar to get it spot on; my brother's was to sieve flour, a task he performed with enormous gusto so that he and the counter tops were dredged in a fine dusting of white powder, mum's was to break and separate eggs, a skill which we observed with the same awe that might inspire a medical student watching a neurosurgeon at work. We were allowed to handle the electric beater, taking it in turns to whip the mixture to a consistency so smooth and silky and air filled that bubbles rose and popped on the surface as if the bowl's contents were sighing with sweet pleasure. The impatience that consumed whilst our cake baked and cooled was unbearable



*“I thought warm and grateful thoughts about my mother. She instilled in us nothing but a total and unconditional pleasure in food and eating.”*

but finally Mum declared, the back of her hand against the sponge languishing on a wire rack to test for temperature, that it was time to decorate it. We filled it with butter icing that was flavoured and stained mocha with Camp Coffee Essence. When Mum had sandwiched the two halves carefully together a feat that we regarded with almost as much awe as her egg breaking skills, the tips of our tongues caught between our teeth, necks craned to perfectly witness this episode of confectionary engineering we watched her spread the top with chocolate icing made from a paste of icing sugar and cocoa powder (which was sifted as clumsily and enthusiastically together by my brother as the flour) and boiling water. She dipped a palette knife into a mug of still warm water before each stroke so the icing set mirrorsmooth and glossy, and the cake looked too beautiful to cut. To this day I follow the same recipe that my mother used for that Chocolate Cake, easily multiplying ingredients depending on how many hungry people there are for afternoon tea: 2 eggs, 4 oz of sugar, butter, flour, cocoa to colour and taste, 3 eggs and six of everything, 4 and it's 8. And I cannot eat it, cannot bite into that sinful (so that's why the Devil I think?) chocolaty taste piqued with coffee and creamy with butter without being thrown back to those gloriously happy, life affirming afternoons.

Sometimes we made a Victoria Sponge cake, two halves clinched in a kiss with thickly whipped cream and strawberry jam from a tin all pinkly squishing out of the sides, and dredged with a snowstorm of caster sugar. Eating Victoria Sponge cake made me feel English because, Mum said, Queen Victoria invented it. Sometimes we made Scotch Pancakes. (Which made me briefly believe that we really were the Half-Scottish-and-half-Irish we were



always told we were even thought we were white children growing up in Africa pretending sometimes to be English). We dropped the batter, which mum had beaten to a smooth sheen, onto a hot griddle and waited until tiny bubbles appeared, when they did we knew that the underside was brown and the pancake ready to flip. We made a great warmly steaming heap and piled them into a clean dishcloth. We ate them seated at a table set for tea with china and linen dripping with teeth achingly sweet Tate and Lyle's Golden Syrup. I cannot consider a tin of the stuff, lid sticky on my larder shelf today, without a small sentimental swell.

The way we cook and eat, our whole attitude to food, is bound with memories that sustain and nourish the way we cook for, and eat





Left to right: Anthony Bourdain; Scotch pancakes with blueberries; Individual Victoria Sponge; Red lentil dahl with tofu; Dahl; Salad Nicoise.



with, our partners, our children, our friends later. Gabrielle Hamilton who wrote *Blood, Bones and Butter: The Inadvertent Education of a Reluctant Chef* described by fellow published foodie Anthony Bourdain as 'simply the best memoir by a chef ever', had a difficult relationship with a difficult mother – a French woman who taught her how to properly pronounce, like a European and not an American she remembers, the 's' in *Salade Niçoise* and *Vichyssoise*, yet that same tricky woman inadvertently gifted her a passion – an education and a career: 'For the first time in probably the entire decade that had passed since I had seen or spoken to my own mother, I thought warm and grateful thoughts about her. She instilled in us nothing but a total and unconditional pleasure in food and eating.'

Hamilton's whole ethos in creating her successful New York restaurant, *Prune*, is founded upon her early relationship with food and cooking; as soon as she began working " I saw the threebin stainless steel pot sink, exactly like ours, I felt instantly at home and fell into peeling potatoes and scraping plates for the dishwasher like it was my own skin. And that, just like that, is how a whole life can start." And her upbringing meant she knew exactly the type of restaurant she wanted ' a place with a *Velvet Underground* CD that made you nod your head and feel warm with recognition. I wanted the lettuce and the eggs at room temperature ... I wanted the tarnished silverware and chipped wedding china from a paladar in Havana, and the canned sardines I ate in that little apartment on TwentyNinth Street. The marrow bones my mother made us eat

as kids that I grew to crave as an adult. We would have brown butcher paper on the tables, not linen tablecloths, and when you finished your meal, the server would just pull the pen from behind her ear and scribble the bill directly on the paper like [the waitresses in France] had done. We would use jelly jars for wine glasses. There would be no foam and no 'conceptual' or 'intellectual' food; just the salty, sweet, starchy, brothy, crispy things that one craves when one is actually hungry'

Hunger: so vital in sustaining enjoyment of food, love, life. The last word, then, must go to M F K Fisher – about whom poet W H Auden said, "I do not know of anyone in the States who writes better prose" who wrote "Like most humans, I am hungry...our three basic needs, for food and security and love, are so mixed and mingled and entwined that we cannot straightly think of one without the others. So it happens that when I write of hunger, I am really writing about love and the hunger for it..."

#### FIVE FABULOUS FOOD MEMOIRS TO DEVOUR

**Tender at the Bone** by Ruth Reichl

**Blue Plate Special** by Kate Christensen

**The Gastronomical Me** by MFK Fisher

**Blood, Bones and Butter** by Gabrielle Hamilton Kitchen

**Confidential** by Anthony Bourdain

Words by: Anthea Rowan

# Reza Mahammad

## THE SPICE PRINCE

A much-loved restaurateur and television personality thanks to his many hit shows such as *A Place in France*, *Coconut Coast* and of course the *Spice Prince of India*.

**R**eza Mahammad never wanted to run his family's restaurant and he certainly never dreamed that he would carve out a career as a TV chef or as a best-selling author of cookery books. Instead he imagined himself as an artist or working in the music business. But as the flamboyant chef will tell you, life does not always go as planned.

Today Reza is a much-loved television personality thanks to his numerous hit shows such as *A Place in France*, *Coconut*

*Coast* and the *Spice Prince of India*. But had it not been for a tragic loss some 38 years ago then his life may have taken a very different path. "I wanted to get into music and the arts. But my parents had told me piano lessons wouldn't get me anywhere and they wanted me to be a doctor or a lawyer," he recalls. "But when my father passed away there was a business that needed to be taken over and everything changed. "The choices you were going to have, don't become your choices.



Left: Poached pears. This page: Food Network star Reza Mahammad; Spiced potato & coconut.

So I ended up getting into the restaurant business and I had absolutely no idea what I was doing. "I was 16 and didn't have the faintest clue how to run a restaurant. I had just come out of boarding school in India and I thought I better get some hotel management training in order to better understand that business. So that's exactly what I did." Reza's father, Sheikh Mahammad, had opened the Star of India in 1954, back when most Indian restaurants were serving bland chicken tikka to a crowd who were more interested in their beverage choices than they were the food being consumed. But in London's trendy South Kensington the Star – as it became affectionately known by regulars – was breaking the mould. And when Reza was thrust into running the restaurant it would soon attract a wealth of famous singers, actors and musicians.

"We were the first Indian restaurant in Kensington and subsequently

*"Indian food has such richness and diversity of flavours because the country is massive. And the cuisine changes from one region to the next."*

lots opened within a few doors of each other. So when I was put in charge I had to have some creative input as the restaurant didn't reflect me and what I was about," he says. "People used to think I was mad, they said 'stick with what is working'. But I said 'you have to move with the times' and so I decided to change the theme completely. I decided to show them what Indian restaurants could look like. "We had huge chandeliers and there were murals on the wall. It looked so wacky and wonderful and it was so ahead of its time. It looked fabulous." Not only did Reza discover a natural talent when it came to changing the décor of the restaurant, he was also integral in helping the Star continually overhaul its menu.

As each decade passed he was able to introduce new, flavourful dishes, putting a spin on Indian classics and also introducing lighter,

seasonal menus. He even banned additives and colourings. "There was nothing quite like it. The restaurant ended up looking like the Sistine Chapel in the 90's and the food changed throughout as well," he says. "In conjunction with the makeovers we changed the style of food. Back in the 80's and 90's it was all about chicken tikka masalas and that style of food. But Indian food has such richness and diversity of flavours because the country is massive. And the cuisine changes from one region to the next. That's when we started making changes and pioneering that." But was Reza ever worried about alienating the regulars or upsetting his mother, Kulsum, who was so integral to the restaurant's early success? "In those days 99 per cent of all our clients were regulars and they thought I was crazy to keep changing it. But they were being introduced to this new style of food and we started getting some amazing

reviews. "We had fashion designers, pop stars, movie stars, you name it. Everyone from royalty to the taxi driver, it was wonderful and everyone was treated equally so it was really fun. "But yes, my mother was horrified when I first started making the changes. And she used to fall about laughing when I would ask how to cook a certain dish. But she is an extraordinary cook and she accepted that I had to run the restaurant my own way."

With a thriving restaurant and a regular clientele that would put most A-list parties to shame, Reza was once again thrust in a new and unexpected direction. Having featured in a television series named Curry Connections in the 80's and then featured on Flavours of India in the early 90's, Reza finally came into his own in front of the camera when acting as a co-presenter alongside Sanjeev Bhaskar

This spread, clockwise: Tandoori King Prawns & Beef; Laal Mass; Rose petal & cardamom kulfi; Spicy Chicken Burger; Reza Mahmud & Jenny Morris

on Delhi Belly in 2001. Finally feeling more confident, the series would lead to book deals and numerous more television appearances. But it seems that despite his outgoing demeanour, he was a reluctant TV star. "I never went running after TV, it sort of just followed me," says Reza. "I hated being in front of the camera and I remember being petrified when doing shows in the early days. I was thrown in the deep end and it put me off for quite a few years. In fact, I think they fired me after the first episode I ever did so that didn't do my ego any good either. "But subsequently I was discovered again and ended up doing two series with Channel Four [in England] and numerous shows on the Food Network. It has been truly wonderful, and I always learn so much as you can't be a know it all. I always say every day is a school day as you are constantly learning." Even now there is nothing Reza enjoys more than being among fellow chefs and learning more about a craft that he inadvertently fell into, but now loves.

He continues to travel as much as he possible can and always

*“There’s an art to Indian cooking and it doesn’t have to be scary. You just have to get everything lined up and ready, then it is easy to create the depth of flavour.”*





## GOURMET TRAVELLER



attempts to discover the best ingredients in order to broaden his knowledge. "It's nice to visit Michelin starred restaurants but when I travel I want to know what the locals eat," says Reza. "You want to know the local flavours and then you can refine it or do whatever you want to do with it. "Once you understand the depth and the root of the ingredients, you can begin to play around with it. I love mixing elements and flavours, but I will always do it in a clever way. I like to build layers and make sure the heat comes at the end, rather than right in your face." Experimenting with ingredients and passing on his knowledge helps Reza maintain his passion for food.

While in the UAE capital for the Taste of Abu Dhabi he was most excited about interacting with attendees during his various cooking classes. It is this hands on experience that he enjoys the most and it is the reason he has taken on a new project. "Being up close with your audience is especially wonderful as you get to interact with your fans, that is so important, as it makes it feel much more real," says Reza. "Now I'm also cooking in people's homes, that's my latest thing. I am travelling and teaching, so they get a hands on experience which is fantastic. I also have a cooking school near Bordeaux which again I love to run so I am keeping busy."

Certainly by spending time in the company of Reza, his passion for food becomes infectious and anyone fortunate enough to cook alongside him will discover how much fun being in the kitchen can be. And if there is one piece of advice he can pass on to those who are intimidated when it comes to cooking Indian food, it is this. "There's an art to Indian cooking and it doesn't have to be scary," he adds. "You just have to get everything lined up and ready, then it is easy to create the depth of flavour. It can be overwhelming but throw yourself in at the deep end and enjoy yourself."

This advice has certainly worked for Reza and thanks to his enthusiasm for food, combined with his ability to make cooking hugely flavourful dishes so easy, he is sure to be a firm favourite for many more years to come. [www.rezamahammad.co.uk](http://www.rezamahammad.co.uk)

Words: Adrian Beck. Images: Taste of Abu Dhabi, F&T; Shutterstock



# HIMALAYAN HEALTH

Discover a luxury spa resort situated at the Himalayan foothills of Northern India.

The waiter was very helpful. A modern meal plan swami. And gastro guru. More a marashi (Great Seer) than a maître d'.

Never have I been served by someone so mindful of my health. It was an evening of edible enlightenment.

Happiness is easy to find. In a former Indian vice-regal palace in Uttarkhand. Near Rishikesh where the Beatles studied "Transcendental Meditation" fifty years ago.

"The Ananda in the Himalayas", is an hour flight from Delhi to Dehadrun and then a 45-minute drive up into the Sal forest foothills overlooking the Ganges. The source of the sacred river is 250kms away.

"Ananda" is one of the most luxurious Ayurvedic spa destinations in the world. The 1910 Maharaja's palace has recently had a US\$5m makeover and facelift.

(modern soul food). The son of an engineer who enjoyed cooking, 42-year old Biswas previously worked at Four Seasons, Maldives, London's Renaissance Chancery Court, Verraswamy's, Novotel Kolkata, Taj Palace, New Delhi and Mumbai's Atmantan Wellness Resort. He specializes in "Sattvic" cooking, originally created for the development of higher/cosmic consciousness. He swears by black pepper, Yashtimadu (liquorice), wok tossed lady's fingers and poison gooseberry!

Otherwise known as Indian ginseng, winter cherry or "Ashwagandha". He is dedicated to pacifying the gastric juices. "I have always been interested in healing foods. Food is the medicine and medicine is thy food. Ayurvedic cooking is a saviour. "Sattvic foods are abundant in Prana: the life forces. Organic, fresh and ripe. They build brain tissue, develop "ojas" (more radiant lustre or aura),

*"Happiness is easy to find. In a former Indian vice-regal palace in Uttarkhand! Close to Rishikesh where the Beatles studied "Transcendental Meditation" fifty years ago."*

The origins of Ayurveda ("knowledge of life") are found in the sixth century "Atharvaveda" texts, containing a hundred hymns sung to cure disease.

The kitchen brigade wanted me to experience the ultimate "Sat-Chit Ananda".

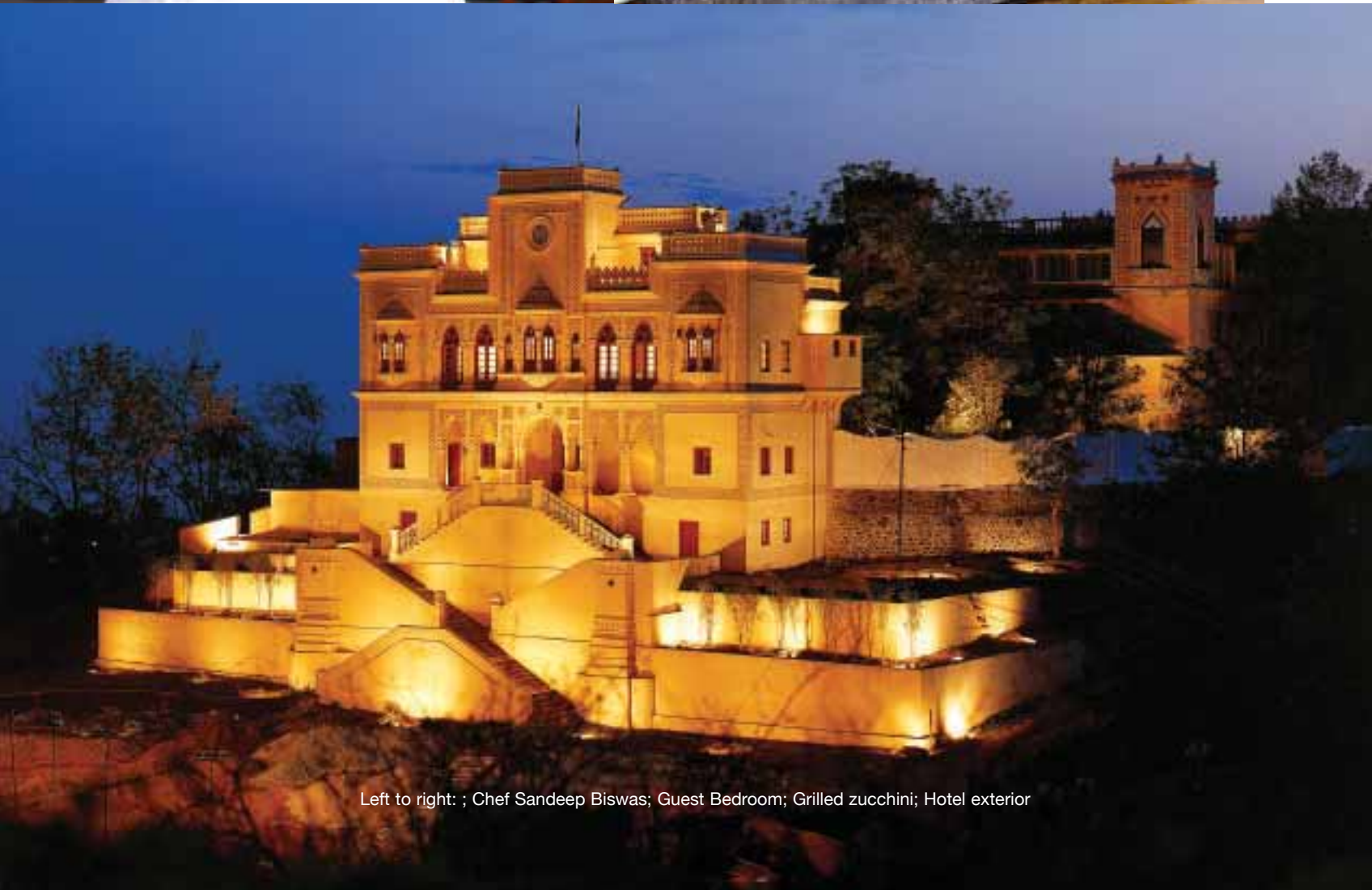
To experience a state of pure, unalloyed joy, absolute, ever-enduring and unchanging through three courses. I pressed my palms together and embraced the menu of Executive Chef and Culinary Director Sandeep Biswas who has attained mastery of the way of Mung (the supreme comprehension of yellow split lentils), is a convert to herbal blending and a devotee of spa cuisine

raise vibrational levels and refine the etheric body.

Continues Biswas: "Sattvic means pure essence. It's the purest diet for a consciously spiritual and healthy life. True health is a serene mind in control of a fit body. I use soothing sun foods – sprouted whole grains, legumes, seed milk, fruit pulps and vegetable purees."

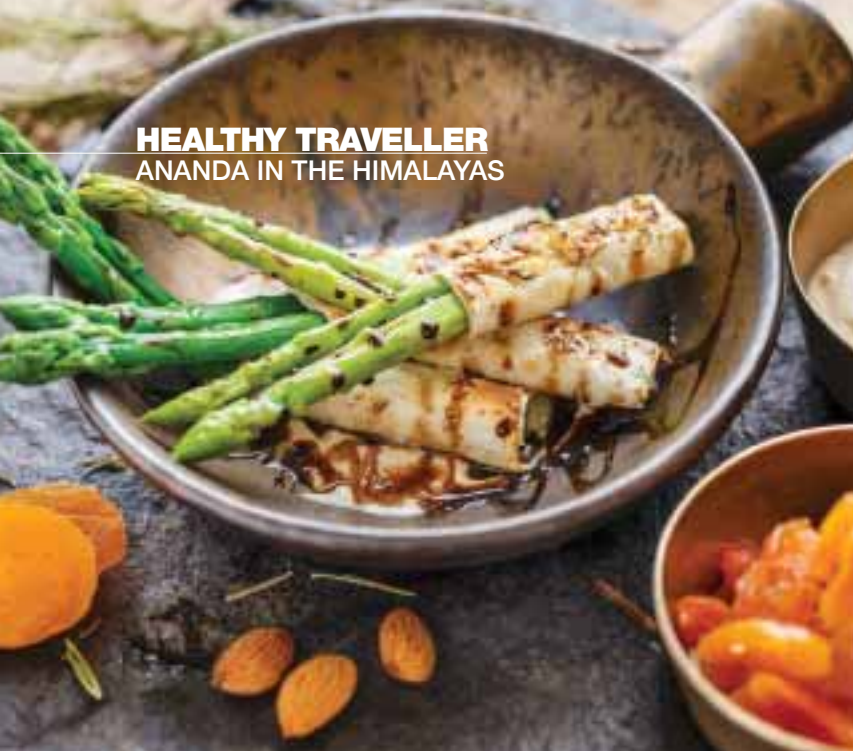
Biswas has recently launched a Ayurvedic cookery app. "The body is made up of three elements – air, fire and earth. These must be in harmony. Every body and personality type has its own most therapeutic ingredient and most beneficial cooking style."

Having deciphered my "dosha" and identified my "Kapha" body type and recommended to consider some life-extending neem



Left to right: ; Chef Sandeep Biswas; Guest Bedroom; Grilled zucchini; Hotel exterior

## HEALTHY TRAVELLER ANANDA IN THE HIMALAYAS



leaves, life-affirming legumes and plenty of fenugreek to control dandruff Chef left me in the hands of a waiter.

Who immediately confessed to be a body builder.

He executed a textbook Indian head wobble to imply chef wouldn't hold back on Kaptha- friendly turmeric and hing (asafoetida). He made suggestions to best facilitate nutrient absorption and cosset my "agni" (digestive powers). He advised against certain choices that would wreak havoc on my large intestine and may lead to bad sleep. He recommended I kick-start every day with the much-revered "thulasi" holy basil" tonic. And upgrade my body with Chef Biswas's Masala goat with jasmine rice. He raved about the non-changing, eternal values of his black cod curry, crab chutneys and his signature millet dishes. Smiling serenely, at peace with himself and his intestinal tract, he told me that eggplant with cucumber would never bring grace into my bowels. He also recommended whitewater rafting and a game of golf on the hotel's six-hole Par 3 course.

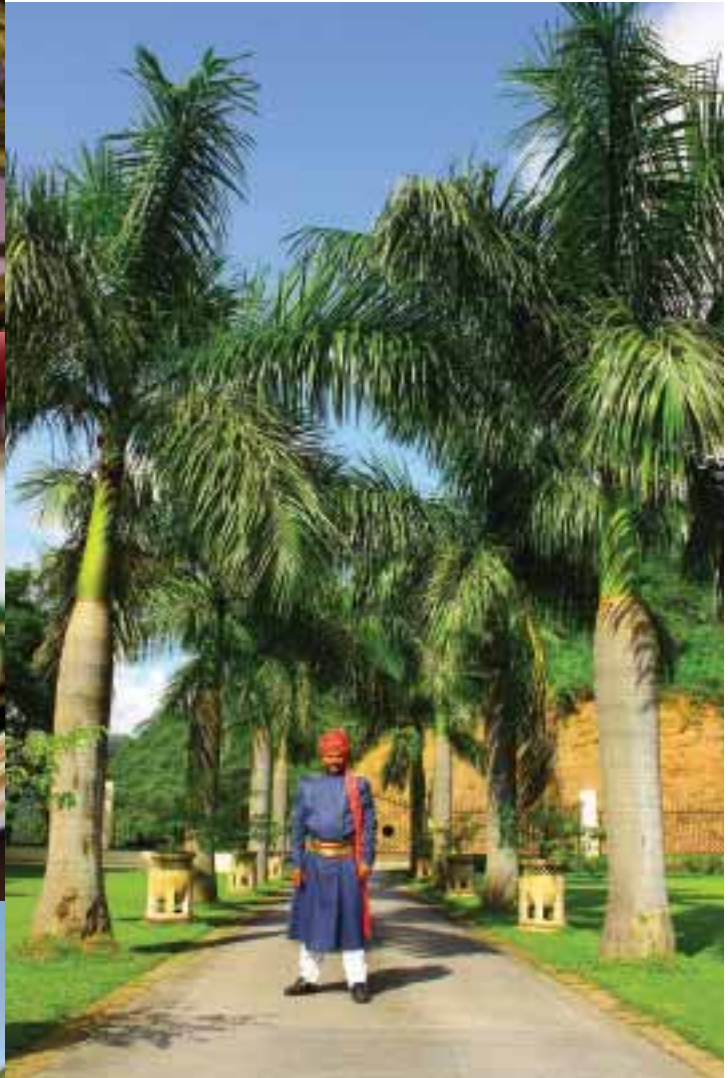
Rishikesh, once India's yoga capital, now targets adventure tourists as well as transformative one. You can now bungee jump from above and zip-wire over the sacred jade green waters of the Ganges.

A full and contented life can become a living reality through a regimen of chickpea poultices, nostril washes, avoiding potatoes and eating more millet, regular and ruthless exfoliation, express pedicures, skull polishing, eyebrow threading and drinking more





This spread, clockwise: Baked Asparagus; Guest room; Under the night sky; Garden entrance; View from the hotel; Meditation in garden; Japanese stew



beetroot and watermelon juice.

As well as lying on your back and letting a stranger pour buttermilk over your forehead.

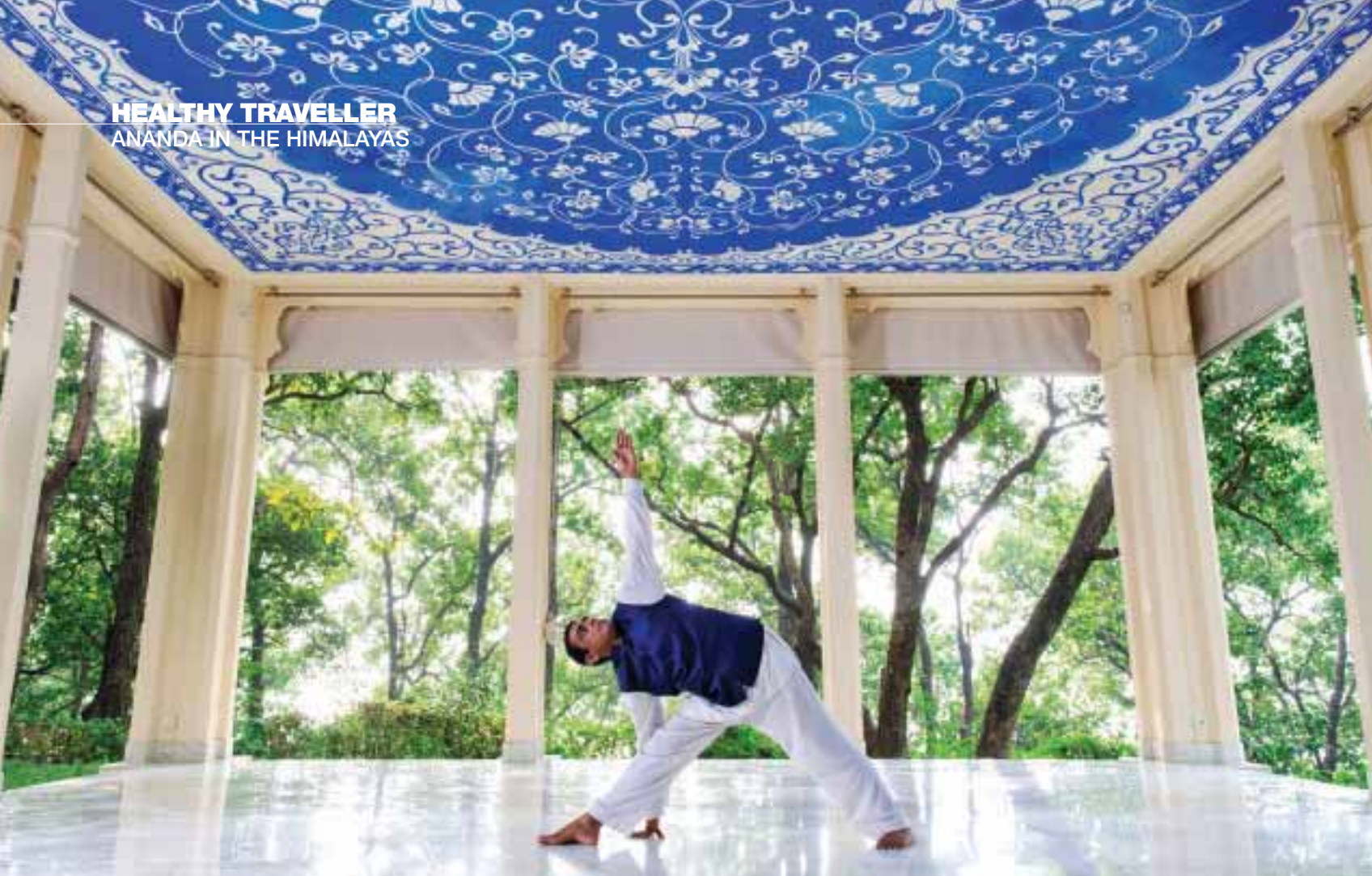
Modern PK ( Panchakarma) disciples and self- improvement disciples, having had their marigold petal garlands and loose cotton Kurta jim-jams fitted and personal Ayurvedic consultant and yogi assigned , are subjected to a "Prakturi" test to find out their Tridosha body type and what their doshas (humours) are vulnerable to and therefore what metabolically calamitous lifestyle choices are inhibiting self-realization and the attainment of all-round "moksha" and the ultimate transformative travel experience.

As well as the gourmet hyper-functional food the 70 room "Ananda in the Himalayas" offers wellness seekers resident and visiting wellness coaches, experts in rolling, intuitive massage, sacro-cranial massage and somatic release. You can go on escorted runs, walks or treks. But it is eating properly, wisely and dynamically that's the art.

"Use all your senses" said my personal, bulked-up waiter the next day. "Take time to appreciate the smell of your meal, the look of your plate, the texture of your food, the different flavors, and the sounds that you make when you eat."

His complexion testified to frequent sesame oil facials and his teeth a testament to betel nut abstention. "Your digestive juices must be at peace. Your tummy must sing like the Upanishads!"

## HEALTHY TRAVELLER ANANDA IN THE HIMALAYAS



Top-to-bottom: Yoga at the Ananda Spa; Ananda Spa Garden; Hors d'oeuvres.

Ananda also offers guided meditation, daily Vedanta lectures to educate you into the eternities, four-handed synchronized massages, quality candle and fragrant joss stick staring time, induced vomiting classes, and other Shatkriyas - body purifying techniques.

As well the chance to perfect "Bhujangasna" or yogic cobra pose to stimulate your adrenal glands and lessen troubling constipation issues.

You meet your fellow guests in the grounds or by the pool and discuss us how your "marma" energy points and bio-energies in general have been miraculously revived, your sluggish bowels enlivened, your adult acne cured by curd face masks and herbal pastes.

I met one lady - a fellow Kaptha-dominant guest - who had successfully mortified her ego, annihilated the self and sweated out much intense Karmic sickness. She claimed to have transformed unilateral passion into universal adoration.

Thanks to Tibetan ila treatments, various body and mind healing sessions and the administration of miscellaneous very pricey decoctions via various routes, she said she had become more accepting. Even of sitar music.

And the lack of Wi-Fi.

Mr Biswas's cooking had been productive. Her pathways had been cleansed. She had been converted to miscellaneous vegetarian chutneys.

And spelt chaff filled pillows.

My dosha is very happy.

For the time being. My poison gooseberry intake is still high.

Ananda in the Himalayas.

[www.anandaspa.com](http://www.anandaspa.com)



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# JEAN-LUC VILA

## Executive Chef - Bateel

Vila perfectly understands the need to evolve both the food that is offered and the way in which it is prepared and served

For more than a decade Jean-Luc Vila has been carefully crafting the dishes that have transformed Bateel from a small business offering premium dates to a large enterprise consisting of luxurious boutiques, artisanal bakeries and premium cafés.

It has been a remarkable rise for the company that started with humble beginnings in the small town of Al-Ghat in Saudi Arabia. Yet once you meet the larger-than-life chef at the helm, it becomes obvious as to why Bateel has enjoyed such rapid growth.

Vila perfectly understands the need to evolve both in terms of the food that is offered and the way in which it is prepared and delivered. He also has a great appreciation for the way the UAE has grown and the demands that come with a rising population.

"After 10 years we don't have the same customers anymore," he says. "We have to adapt to that and look at the younger generation who like to order online and eat healthier. So now there is more focus on salads and vegan dishes, as well as organic bread and eggs.

"The last few years the health conscious have had a big impact so in our next menu we will offer two pages just with gluten free and vegetarian dishes. It's good to have a special section.

"We are also looking to change the menu according to the location as in Media City people are busy and don't have an hour to sit down for lunch. We have to respond to that. We will look at offering something that is pre-packed and ready but still retains that same quality. We have to respond to demand."

Fortunately, after close to 12 years as head chef at Bateel, Vila now has a core team that he can count on. When he wants to introduce changes to the menu his team immediately understand how dishes should be prepared and presented.

This is hugely beneficial given that there is nothing Vila enjoys more than creating. Having left his homeland of France more than 20 years ago he loves to travel and experience new cultures and taste different ingredients. This knowledge is then transferred onto



This spread, from left to right: Bateel - Cafe; Chef Jean-Luc Vila; Bateel - Bakery; Bakery selection; Bateel Poke Bowl.

the plate at Bateel.

"I love to visit local markets in every country that I travel to as that way I can have a better of understanding of what the locals eat," says Luca. "I was in Bali recently and I tried some nice restaurants, but it wasn't what Balinese food is. So I found guy on the beach doing traditional barbeque and it was amazing.

"It was just fish with some local spices, but the flavour, it was amazing. It was the same when I went to India and Nepal. In fact, wherever I go I always make sure to try the street food.

"Even here in Dubai I go to Global Village and get spices from the Yemeni stand. Though most recently I found a dry lemon from

Iran. I studied it and found that lots of two and three Michelin star restaurants in France use it. It is very strong and is perfect for marinating dishes."

This fascination with discovering new flavours and sensations began when Vila moved to Mauritius. Having trained at a culinary school in Toulouse and then specialised in pastry and chocolate in Switzerland, he was offered the chance to work on the island in the Indian Ocean.

It was this move that opened the French chef's eyes to a world of culinary possibilities.

"I only planned to go for one year but ended up staying for eight

This spread, from left to right: Chicken breast & saffron rice; Bateel JBR-Emporium; Bateel Treats; Chicken breast on saffron rice; Smoked salmon bagel



as there was such good products and a very high level of food in Mauritius,” explains Vila. “It was here I discovered new spices as I had never eaten Indian food or Chinese food. That opened my view and my taste. I changed totally after.

“I was also lucky to work for six months in the Shangri La in Singapore and again I saw very different food. I was using the same classic French techniques but using local ingredients. It was a great experience.”

After leaving Mauritius there would be one more experience that helped shape the philosophy of Vila. Working at the exclusive Sandy Lane hotel in Barbados, he would be tasked with preparing meals for some of the biggest names in the entertainment industry.

During his three-year spell on the Caribbean island, Vila would cook for the likes of Madonna, Rihanna, Michael Jordan, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Pavarotti. He would even play a crucial role in the wedding of one of the world’s greatest golfers, Tiger Woods.

“There was always someone famous as it is very exclusive. I remember playing cards with Pavarotti and he sang a few songs, it was very nice,” recalls Vila.

“One of the biggest events was Tiger Woods’ wedding as we made 12 cakes just for the testing. His wife couldn’t decide as she liked six out of the 12. So we did a six-level cake with each level a different flavour.

“But what was interesting at the wedding was that his mother’s

family is from Thailand, so we had a big Thai buffet. And his wife was Swedish, so we had lots of seafood. You would have expected luxury, but they went back to their traditional home food.”

Throughout his time in Barbados Vila was surprised at just how many celebrities sought out simple food that reminded them of home. So by the time he left the small island he was ready to put all that he had learnt into practice.

This just happened to coincide with Bateel seeking a head chef. And after an interview with a head-hunter and a meeting with the CEO of the company, he was ready to begin his life in Dubai.

“I actually met the CEO on the way to Paris and we spent eight hours discussing food,” he says. “He wanted someone with French training but also with the ability to use local ingredients. That was his idea and now 12 years later we are still doing just that.”

Joining Bateel at the very early stages of the company’s existence meant that Vila had a strong say in how the brand should go forward. When first opening the only products on offer were dates, chocolates and some cookies.

And despite Vila having such a strong background in the patisserie world, he was determined to showcase his ability as a chef de cuisine and believed that Bateel could enter the market as a café.

“When I first joined I was even asked to help build the factory where we would make a lot of the products. So it took us a while to get going,” says Vila. “But then the CEO went to a big food fair in



*“I love to visit local markets in every country that I travel to as that way I can have a better of understanding of what the locals eat,”*

Germany and he found a lot of good ingredients, so I suggested we do a small coffee shop and focus on good ingredients.

“I went to visit the farm and checked the harvest and we worked on some simple recipes. We started adding soup, sandwiches and pasta onto the menu. Then it was breakfast and main courses. After 10 years the menu has really changed.

“But it still comes back to traditional home cooking and the days I would spend with my grandmother. The flavours she produced I will never forget and it was all good ingredients and simple food. For me, that is the perfect formula.”

To this day, Vila still enjoys returning home and sampling his grandmothers’ cooking. But having not lived in France since 1994 both his own and his children’s palette’s have become less accustomed to the classic chicken or rabbit.

Vila cooks for his son and daughter every day now and it is his teriyaki salmon that proves the most popular, not just with his own children but also with their classmates at school.

“At home I cook and during the week they all know what they want for lunch. But on the weekend we try new things,” says Vila. “Friday and Saturday is our day to experiment, while on Thursday evening

we will pick a restaurant to eat in.

“But they don’t want Alain Ducasse or French food, no my daughter loves spicy Indian food and my son loves Japanese. They are totally open to different cuisines. It is fantastic.”

Vila uses these trips and his weekend’s at home to create new dishes, many of which will end up making their way onto the menu at Bateel. Having just created a new menu that will be introduced in February, he is already working on the next menu change.

It is a major change from his days as a pastry chef, but it seems he was always destined to become a head chef.

“I liked pastry as I was very mathematically orientated and in pastry you have to measure perfectly or else it is screwed up,” he adds. “It is a very clean process and straight away I was one of the best. But I was once told that a good pastry chef will be a good chef, but a good chef de cuisine will not always be a good pastry chef. So for me, the transition was easy.”

Clearly the wise chef who made this declaration to Vila was correct and it is Bateel and its customers who are benefitting as Vila continues to produce simple yet hugely flavourful food.

[www.bateel.com](http://www.bateel.com)



# GYPSY CHIEF

**David Myers is a renowned Michelin-starred chef, restaurateur, and TV personality, with host of well-deserved awards and accolades**

For many chefs their first experience in the heat of the kitchen can either make or break them. The gruelling hours in a hugely stressful and demanding atmosphere can prove too much for many. However, for those who relish the intense environment, success is more than likely to come their way.

David Myers is clearly the latter as he has gone on to become a Michelin starred chef and global restaurateur. But when he starts to

recall his first experience behind the line, you wonder why on earth he pursued a career inside the kitchen.

"My first job I ended up working next to a guy who was a drug dealer and a gangster. Another guy was threatening my life every day and telling me he had a gun in his car and would kill me after work. I thought what have I done," recalls Myers.

"Then on my second day I cut off the tip of my finger and I was seriously in shock. I went to the hospital and they told me it would grow back but I phoned in work and said I would have to stay home as I wasn't allowed to get it wet.

"So the chef asked me to come back in and I thought I would get loads of sympathy but he threw a big box of lettuce at me and told me to \*\$@!\* wash it. That summed up the business to me and it was painful, but I did wash the lettuce."

"I learned a big lesson that day and never called in sick for work, not once. I'm very thankful for that time as I gained a better understanding of what it requires to be a chef."

Clearly Myers possesses plenty of determination given his rough start to life in the kitchen. Another example of this characteristic is the way he approached the early stages of his fledgling career. Right from the get go, Myers decided that the only way he would improve was to seek out and work at the very best restaurants and with the highest calibre of chefs.

This would see the American leave his hometown of Ohio to work first in Chicago with acclaimed chef Charlie Trotter, then in France at three Michelin-starred restaurant Les Crayères. His next stop would be in New York where he worked with Daniel Boulud and





This spread, left to right: David Myers; Interior; Bleu Blanc; Poppy.

*“Working with Charlie Trotter was the most intense period of my life. When you leave there, you have a sense that you can do anything.”*

finally across the country to Los Angeles with Joaquim Spichal at the highly commended restaurant Patina.

“From day one I wanted to open a restaurant, but I knew I needed some good experience. There was a beautiful red cookbook from Charlie Trotter that I remember getting and it was the first cookbook of its kind as it had a picture and a recipe,” says Myers.

“So I went to Chicago to work with Charlie and got to travel around the US doing events. It was a great experience because we travelled like rock stars. We were travelling first class, wearing suits, we were chefs, who does that? We felt like on top of the world.

“It was the most intense period of my life, working with Charlie. When you leave there, you have a sense that you can do anything. I was truly not afraid of anything. It was a hell of a feeling and I am thankful for that opportunity.

“It was also Charlie who agreed to let me work in France and I was so excited as I was told they had a great Japanese sous chef at the restaurant. It was my first trip overseas, my first stamp in my passport and I worked there for three months. It was a great experience.”

Working in a three Michelin star kitchen once again reinforced how tough the kitchen environment could be. There were no wannabe gangsters, but rather a tight brigade who knew only

perfection would suffice.

“Working in those kinds of restaurants it was intense, your mindset has to be like a navy seal,” he says. “It is like a boot-camp that last six months being in those tough kitchens.

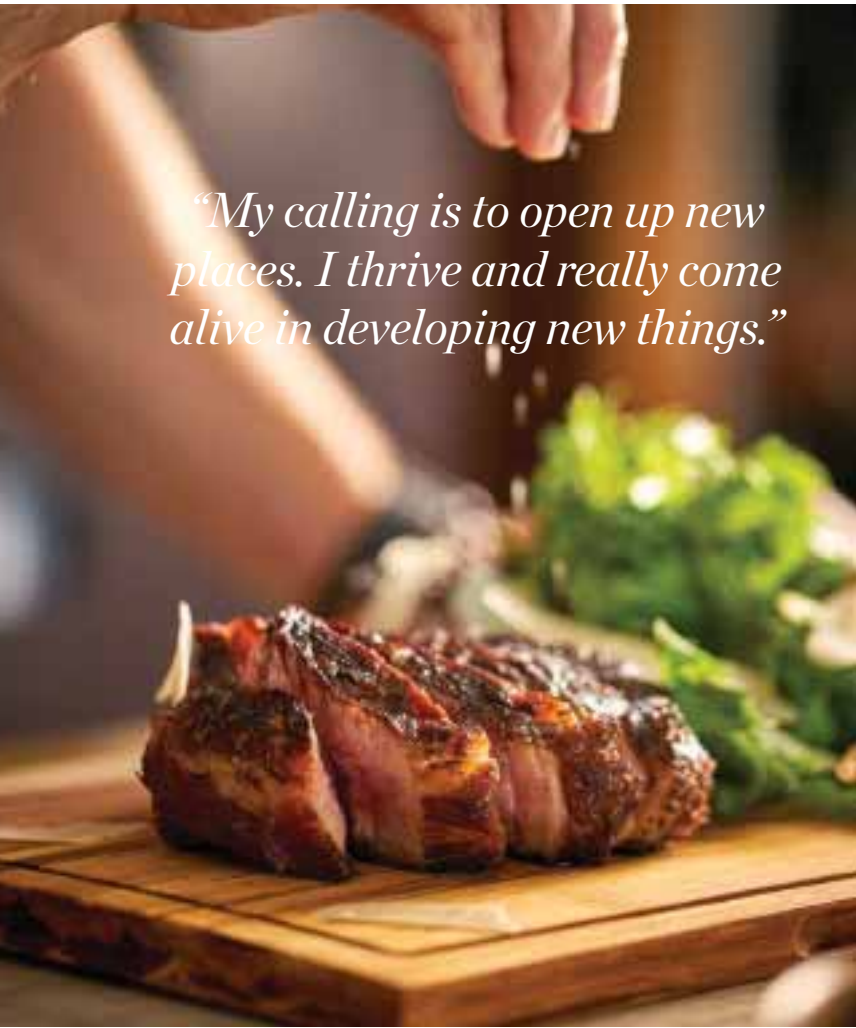
“Nobody remembers your name; they will knock you out cold if you make a mistake. It is an intense culture. But I relished it. I loved that challenge and that intensity. We worked crazy hard and we would party hard, but we were a team of brothers and sisters. I wouldn’t change anything.”

But before he could live out his desire to explore he knew that he had to make his own mark. And so by the age of 27, and with a great deal of fortune, he was able to open Sona in Los Angeles.

“When I was working in LA I asked the ultimate question and that was does anyone know a millionaire? And would you believe it, one of the guys working there was a son of a guy who had created a successful tech company,” explains Myers.

“So that started a slow and beautiful conversation about opening a restaurant. And thankfully we opened and started to get a lot of interest and accolades.”

In fact, Myers would be named Best New Chef by the influential Food & Wine magazine and before too long a Michelin star arrived.



*“My calling is to open up new places. I thrive and really come alive in developing new things.”*

But he was never truly content. There was a desire to stay and help the restaurant gain three stars, yet at the same time there was a craving to feed his lust for travel.

“When I got my first star of course I was happy, but I immediately wanted three stars. We were always pushing to get three as we always want to be the best we can be,” he says.

“But for sure my calling is to open up new places. I thrive and really come alive in developing new things. I enjoy that process. There is a point where you are totally comfortable and content with mastering your craft, or you have an interest to grow in other areas. And I have that.”

It was during a trip to Japan the desire to travel became insatiable. Myers immediately felt at home and loved the discipline of the chefs who were so focused on the details. The more he travelled across Asia, the more determined he became to open a restaurant in the region.

He opened the ‘David Myers Café’ in Tokyo that brought a taste of the American West Coast to the modern Japanese city, then came ‘Sola’, a patisserie also in Tokyo. Then it was to Singapore where he opened Adrift and shortly after ‘AnOther Place’ opened in Hong Kong.

“For better or worse I have always had an interest in multiple things. I’m as happy at being in the South of France as I am being in Bangkok. I really resonate with it,” says Myers. “I couldn’t be stuck to one, I would be miserable.

“That’s why I push so hard to create new things and come up with new concepts, because I am interested in not only the challenge of it all, but how I can push the creative process. The more unique the better.



“Three years ago when I turned 40 I decided I wanted to do international significantly. My ultimate goal is to be in 15 countries and I have a long way to go, but I have never been happier. I may be in a constant state of jet lag, but travel opens my eyes to new cultures, ingredients and spices. It helps me be creative.”

This thirst to travel and open new concepts in different countries ultimately led to Myers being approached to open a restaurant in Dubai. The original idea was to open a large location set over two floors at the Renaissance Hotel in Business Bay. However, as soon as he saw the space an idea struck.

Instead of one restaurant, Myers convinced the owners that he could create three unique concepts that would fill the space. Four years have now passed since that conversation and BASTA!, Bleu Blanc and Poppy have all opened their doors.

Yet having decided to open in Dubai and agreeing to create three unique concepts, Myers was suddenly struck with how immense

This spread, clockwise: Bistecca Fiorentina; Basta! interior; Charred octopus; David Myers; Marinated Big Eye Tuna



the challenge would be. Not only would he be creating the menus, but he is hands on when it comes to every detail of the restaurants.

While walking through each location Myers explains in great detail how every aspect was carefully selected, from the vintage cutlery to the worn looding rugs in Bleu Blanc that hold a resemblance to the furnishings in his own home in LA.

"I don't think you could write crazy big enough to really detail just how big it was. I don't know what I was thinking when I suggested doing three concepts," he says. "At first I thought, 'oh god, what have I got myself into'. I felt like I would have a heart attack.

"But then the moment passed, and I was excited. I had that dark place moment, but then it blew away. I am thrilled and excited and can't imagine doing it any other way. I don't think I could go back to opening just one restaurant.

"I am so glad we did a French, an Italian and a small speakeasy as it was definitely the right move."

Thankfully, because of his insatiable wanderlust, Myers has no issue with spending little time at his home in Los Angeles. And he makes sure of visiting all of his various restaurants around the globe as much as possible.

"I love to travel so I will be back every month for at least the first six months to make sure everything is right. At the most it will drop back to every other month as it is so important to keep your finger on the pulse," says Myers.

"If you do these outposts it is important to keep coming and I learned that from opening in Singapore. You have to put the work in."

Myers is certainly doing just that. With nine concepts in four cities around the world it is little surprise that he speaks of being constantly in a state of jet leg. Yet there is no intention to slow down, it is quite the opposite.

"I would love to have places in 15 cities," adds Myers. "I have 10 projects in my head that I want to realise, and I think these will either be on trend or perhaps a little ahead.

"Also I think a few of the existing restaurants are worthy to move into different marker. I think Adrift is ripe to open in Dubai. It's a natural fit."

So it seems Myers could be spending a lot more time in this region. And all we can say it is a good job gangsters with guns where not enough to scare this talented chef away from the kitchen.

Words: Adrian Beck



# Paul Bocuse

## 1926-1918

We pay tribute to culinary genius Chef Paul Bocuse who sadly passed away last month at the age of 91. This favourite son of France; holder of 3 Michelin Stars for over 50 years, The Culinary Institute of America's Chef of the Century, Meilleur Ouvrier de France, and the Légion d'honneur – just some of accolades received by the recognised Father of French Cuisine, legend, and one of our most revered contributors and columnists.



When Food and Travel Arabia asked me to become a contributor to their esteemed publication I could see they shared my passion for commitment and quality. I always wanted to be a chef, I grew up in the family restaurant, and for almost 75 years I have strived to be the best chef I can be; and my love of French food and an unbridled commitment to quality has always served me well.

For my first column I was asked to write a little about my formula for success and some of my most treasured achievements - I think many people were expecting me to say earning 3 Michelin stars, an accomplishment of which I am immensely proud, and I still have them over 50 years later; however I would say my proudest moment was in 1961 when I was awarded the title of 'Meilleur Ouvrier de France' (Best Craftsman of France).

I do believe that if you work hard and persevere you get better every day, being consistent isn't enough; you must always strive to improve. My dishes tend to be perhaps more refined and more delicate, using only the freshest and finest of ingredients and a healthy respect for nature.

My flame for French cuisine has never dwindled, and at 90 years of age I hope my legacy will be my desire to pass along my knowledge to the next generation, and encourage them to reach for success and culinary excellence; which is why 30 years ago I created the Bocuse d'Or, a gastronomy contest that places the emphasis on inspiration, refined techniques and passion for the culinary arts. This is the spirit of Paul Bocuse and the spirit of the Bocuse d'Or.

Which is why I am pleased to see that Food and Travel share my commitment to excellence, with the Food and Travel GOC Awards being judged on the basis of quality, talent and consistency by panel of expert judges. "To the winners my congratulations, to the finalists well done and if at first you don't succeed, try, try again - because you will get better and better with every day."

*bocuse.com ~ bocusedor.com*

*This was his debut column for Food and Travel Arabia and it perfectly sums up his, unbridled talent, innate humility and intense passion, which were all evident in abundance*



# Bleu Blanc DUBAI

The tables are stunningly decorated, and the chairs are inviting and comfortable. There is a real homely feel about the restaurant. The open plan kitchen provides diners with the chance to watch the chefs at work.

With successful restaurants in Tokyo, Hong Kong and Singapore, David Myers is the latest acclaimed chef hoping to make an impact in Dubai. The 43-year-old American has taken on the huge task of opening three new concepts inside the Renaissance Downtown Hotel; a Neapolitan pizzeria named Basta, an intimate speakeasy called Poppy and the Southern French farmhouse-inspired Bleu Blanc.

Handed the chance to test out the last on the list, it has to be said that it is one of the most inviting restaurants I have visited in a long time. Greeted by huge wooden blue doors and a wall of home-grown herbs, the large space has been well designed with whitewashed walls and wooden beams.

The tables are stunningly decorated, and the chairs are inviting and comfortable. There is a real homely feel about the restaurant thanks to its large bookcases and worn-look rugs. The open plan kitchen also exudes heat thanks to the wood burning ovens and

provides diners with the chance to watch the chefs at work.

When the menu arrives it is simple but substantial with courses split into bread, raw, starters, wood-fired, mains and vegetables. Thankfully the staff are well informed and with some input from head chef Alex Szkaradkiewicz were able to recommend a wide selection for us to sample.

Very quickly we were treated to some amuse bouche and each was wonderfully presented and simply plated. The heirloom tomato tart could be devoured in just a couple of bites and was rich and creamy thanks to the goat's cheese. The sturia caviar flatbread was also bitesize but packed a punch thanks to the mix of crème fraiche and the saltiness of the ample serving of caviar.

Almost as soon as these dishes disappeared, a selection of starters arrived in the form of a kale salad with toasted walnut oil and a king crab beignet. While the kale was perfectly crunchy, it was the crab that grabbed the attention. The succulent crab was



This spread, clockwise: Bleu Blanc's dining area; Black Angus Striploin cooked on the wood-fired grill; David Myers; Charred Octopus with Pistou and Smoked Aioli.



*“A beautifully crafted restaurant, excellent service, reasonable prices and flavourful dishes, Blue Blanc will provide stiff competition to Dubai’s most popular French restaurants.”*

Words: Adrian Beck. Images: Bleu Blanc; Food and Travel

coated in a light yet crunchy pastry, enhanced thanks to the heat of the horseradish and a slightly spicy cocktail sauce. With three rather large portions it is perfect for sharing amongst a group.

We then moved onto two signature dishes, the first of which helped David Myers earn his first Michelin star. A butter poached lobster risotto with kaffir lemon emulsion, the dish is perfectly balanced with the rich creamy risotto paired with the slight bite and saltiness of the lobster. This is an absolute must order for anyone visiting the restaurant and is well worth the \$20 price tag.

The same could be said for the basil pesto ravioli which chef Alex informed us was his grandmother's recipe. We immediately appreciated why this dish had been passed down through generations with the lemon zest and sundried tomatoes enhancing the pesto and making for a wonderfully light, flavourful and substantial starter.

Then it was time for the main course of lamb shoulder which was

paired with radicchio and Beaufort cheese. The lamb had been slow cooked and simply fell off the bone with some gentle help of the fork. This paired beautifully with the celeriac remoulade, while the chicory had lost much of its bitter taste thanks to being lightly grilled. Once again it was a large portion and for \$39 it was very good value.

Finally, despite our pleas of being well and truly full, we were treated to black forest gateau. Served in a huge bowl and then portioned off by the waiting staff, there was rich dark chocolate, juicy cherries and no short supply of very decadent truffles. A very hearty dessert it was a great way to round off an exceptional meal.

Ultimately, thanks to a beautifully crafted restaurant, excellent service, reasonable prices and a wide array of well balanced and flavourful dishes, Blue Blanc may well provide stiff competition to Dubai's most popular French restaurants.

[bleublanc-dubai.com](http://bleublanc-dubai.com)

Palermo Costa Normanna

Every journey  
is a unique  
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.....  
**VIAGGIA DAVVERO**



# Tried & Tasted



## BOUCHON BAKERY DUBAI

The brainchild of one of the most celebrated chefs in the world Thomas Keller, Bouchon Bakery is the latest addition to the already crowded restaurant scene at The Beach, JBR in Dubai.

Standing out from the crowd in such a densely populated area is far from easy, but when a chef with seven Michelin stars is attached to the restaurant then there will always be a certain amount of buzz.

The location also ensures a huge footfall and being just a short walk from the beach it offers fantastic views thanks to the ample amount of outside seating. Inside the restaurant the dining room is all greens and whites and is particularly spacious. With a well-stocked counter displaying a range of salads and baked goods it proves a hugely inviting space.

As you may expect from a casual bakery it is soups, salads and sandwiches that make up a large percentage of what is available. If you are seeking a hearty dinner then you may be left wanting, but should you require something light and flavoursome then Bouchon delivers in abundance. To start with I tried the Quiche Florentine and was pleasantly surprised with the size of the portion. A rather substantial helping, there was plenty of bite to the buttery crust, while the creamy baked egg custard was brimming with sautéed baby spinach, sweet shallots and a heaping of Gruyère cheese. Yes the few salad leaves and pickles that came with it seemed more of an after-thought, but the quiche itself was wonderfully light, yet at the same time rich and suitably fluffy. It was also very reasonably priced.

Next it was onto one of the salad options and after a brief chat with our very helpful waiter I decided to try the pan seared salmon on a bed of quinoa. Again this was a large portion. It was well cooked, unfortunately it was too salty overpowering the nutty quinoa. The salad itself was nicely seasoned and the signature

Bouchon vinaigrette certainly enhanced the flavour of the vegetables, while the crunchy hazelnuts added a nice roasted element.

I has the opportunity to try some new dishes would soon be added to the menu: a creamy spinach risotto with salmon that would be a welcome addition for someone out for dinner at Bouchon. This time the salmon was perfectly seasoned, but the risotto had been slightly overcooked, however, the flavour was there and with better timing it would have been a fantastic dish. The second preview was rump steak over a bed of roasted potatoes and caramelised onions; accompanied by a mushroom sauce and garlic butter. Another substantial serving and the sliced steak was that perfect blend of pink and red. Personally I would have preferred a more tender cut of beef. Perhaps if it arrives on the menu there will be more choice, in which case, I can see this being a popular dish in the evenings.

Finally it was time for a dessert from the bakery and with so much on offer I was glad to be informed by the manager which items were the bestsellers. And having salivated over numerous pastries I settled upon the signature Bouchons and a selection of macarons, with coconut saffron and passion fruit my personal favourites.

But it was the Bouchon Bakery's rich, chocolatey brownies that stole the show. This trio of small decadent bites are filled with semisweet chocolate chips; both dense in texture yet remarkably light to eat. It is easy to see why they are so popular.

Bouchon Bakery should prove popular for those seeking a light bite at breakfast or a filling lunch. The ready-made salads are an interesting addition and provide anyone in a rush the chance to sample a superior alternative to a store-bought lunch.

But as you may expect it is the bakery that will keep people coming back. The wide variety of tasty treats will no doubt make Bouchon Bakery a firm favourite.

# Where to Eat



This month we find Romance in the UAE, fine fish in Hamburg, celebrate Chinese New Year in Bahrain, and discover Gourmet Burgers in Dubai

## GRAZE B City Walk Dubai

Enjoy casual dining in the Burger Garden with some of Dubai's tastiest, hand-crafted burgers. To make the most of the cool weather, La Ville Hotel & Suites CITY WALK Dubai has introduced an all-new menu at Graze B Burger Garden. Set next to the GRAZE Gastro Grill terrace, serving a delectable array of burgers, and a selection of fries, mocktails and shakes. Try the Half Meter Surprise - at 50cm long – quite possibly the longest burger in town! It features premium beef patties, lettuce, tomato, pickles, chimichurri mayo, Cheddar & Gruyère cheeses, guacamole, barbecue sauce and beef bacon. Although designed for one person with a 'healthy appetite', the Half Meter Surprise may be better suited for sharing! There is also the generous Double Trouble burger, made with 2 beef patties, guacamole and beef bacon, the American street food inspired Swiss & Mushroom with lots of Swiss cheese and a secret Paprika sauce, the Louisiana Creole-style BBQ Roasted Chicken with pineapple and Smoked Chipotle dressing, the Philly Steak Bun, an original recipe of thinly sliced Angus Striploin with the addition of GRAZE's special veal jus and Guajillo --- and lots more! To accompany, there are Classic Fries, Nacho Fries, Meat Fries and Chorizo Fries – so whether you want plain, simple and tasty, vegetarian or carnivore, Tex-Mex, Poutine or Spanish-inspired, there's something mouth-watering to suit all. *Graze B is open weekdays 6pm - 11pm, Fridays 1pm - 11pm, & Saturdays from 7pm - 11pm.* [www.livela ville.com](http://www.livela ville.com)

## Chinese New Year Bahrain

Celebrate Year of the Dog at re/Asian Cuisine by Wolfgang Puck located on the 50th floor of Bahrain's iconic Four Seasons Bahrain Bay. Executive Chef Brian Becher has created a one-of-a-kind menu that kicks off with chicken and wagyu beef soup dumplings, followed by roast duck served with bao buns. Enjoy lo mai yun, sticky rice with local lamb and tangerine puree, and Szechuan chili lamb dumplings, venison buuz, king crab crystal chive dumplings, beef and prawn chiu chow and roasted root vegetable dumplings.

The live-action stations will also showcase delicacies such as the aromatic roasted duckling; Chinese New Year dumplings; flat chive rabbit sausage; and longevity noodles among other festive dishes. To put a sweet ending to the Chinese Night Market event, Pastry Chef Pierre Chambon prepared a tempting Chinese rolled ice-cream in green tea, chocolate and litchi flavours along with his sweet fruit dumplings filled with pear, tangerine and toasted sesame. The entire evening on February 16 is priced at \$115 pp net including beverages.

From February 17 to 28, the restaurant will offer special five or seven course Chinese New Year tasting menus that include a generous dim sum plate with chiu chow, dan dan and XO shrimp dumplings, wagyu beef pot stickers, Hong Kong style black bass served with shitake mushrooms, filet of beef Sichuan au poivre with wok fried green beans on the side, and a mouth-watering dessert duo to mention a few of the carefully crafted festive menus. *The menus are priced at \$110pp (five-course menu) and \$160pp (seven-course menu).* For more information +973 1711 5046 or visit [fourseason.com](http://fourseason.com)



## Love is in the air ABU DHABI

Take that someone special to Hakkasan Abu Dhabi this Valentine's Day; enjoy a romantic dinner for two in the intimate restaurant or dine al fresco on the secluded terrace overlooking the stunning Abu Dhabi skyline. The Hakkasan Valentine's Day menu includes wild morel mushroom soup with tofu, a chef's selection of Dim Sum from mapo wagyu puff to saffron and black bean seabass dumpling, fried Canadian lobster with crispy wheat flakes and dry coconut, charcoal grilled lamb rack with Yin Yang rice noodle' in black bean sauce, and

Vanilla parfait with blood peach sorbet. The Valentine's menu will be available at Hakkasan Abu Dhabi on Wednesday 14th February; prices start at \$165pp including fruit blends, water, tea and coffee 698dhs per person including welcome signature cocktail, wine, fruit blends, water, tea and coffee. Hakkasan is open for lunch Sunday to Thursdays from 12pm – 4pm, for brunch on Fridays from 12pm to 4pm and for dinner Saturday to Wednesday from 7pm – 12am, Thursday and Friday 7pm – 1am. *For reservations at Hakkasan Abu Dhabi, email [hakkasan@emiratespalace.ae](mailto:hakkasan@emiratespalace.ae) or call +971 2 690 7739*



## Versace Valentine Dubai

Romance reigns at Palazzo Versace Dubai this month, with a mouth-watering array of romantic choices for Valentine's Day. Create memorable moments with your loved one over a romantic dinner by the pool overlooking Dubai Creek. Enjoy a romantic dining experience with a menu curated to ensure you have the most wonderful, memorable experience. Enjoy a romantic dinner by the Central pool;

A 5-course set menu at \$680 per couple, including a bottle of bubbly; or boo for a Valentine's Dinner at Vanitas, the signature Italian restaurant at Palazzo Versace Dubai. Set against the luminous waters of the Dubai Creek, Vanitas is the perfect location for an intimate and romantic dinner offering a 4-course set menu \$215 per couple (food only) with dishes such as: ricciola e zuppa fredda di melograno, costolette di manzo disossate, carbonara di fregola al tartufo, raspberry heart. Enigma at Palazzo Versace Dubai is also celebrating Valentine's Day with a specially designed romantic Persian dinner offering a 4-course set menu, priced at \$215 per couple (food only), including sabzi khordan for leili and majnoon, nargesi, sea bass with kuku sabzi, dessert – love bomb (chocolate shell, mix berry curd and raspberry Chantilly and fresh fruit). *For more information visit [palazzoversace.ae](http://palazzoversace.ae)*



## Pier love Dubai

Pierchic, Al Qasr's sophisticated Mediterranean restaurant, sits at the end of long wooden pier straddling the waves of the Arabian Gulf taking in stunning views along the coast and of the iconic Burj Al Arab; the ideal setting for a romantic Valentine's evening. This February 14 Pierchic is offering guests an exclusive Valentine cocktail an exquisite five-course set menu. The Gold Package offers a guaranteed window table, free flowing rosé bubbly and à la carte menu; and is priced at \$1,590 per couple. Prices without beverages start at \$495 per couple. *For more information +971 4 432 3232 [restaurants@jumeirah.com](http://restaurants@jumeirah.com)*

# Places to Stay



This month, we delight in exquisite luxury in Paris, get cosy in Dublin, indulge in an emperor's palace in China, and explore the charms of Edinburgh

VALENTINE BOLTHOLE

## La Réserve Paris FRANCE

Michel Reybier's urban mansion has the elegance of a 19th century private apartment, offering ultra-personalized discrete services. You will find this treasure located between Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré and Avenue Montaigne, and just a stone's throw from the Champs-Élysées, at the beating heart of Paris. Nestled in a peaceful location, slightly set back from the world's most beautiful avenue, La Réserve Paris – Hotel and Spa overlooks the Grand Palais, the Eiffel Tower, the Pantheon and the Concorde obelisk; with a resplendent curtain of trees preserving the intimacy of hotel, reminiscent of the nearby Elysée gardens.

The vast indoor spaces are bathed in light, highlighted with rich fabrics. Beautiful marble fireplaces adorn the rooms, typical of Haussmann-style apartments. The accommodations are more suites than rooms, a library reserved for guests, a smoking lounge, a 16-meter indoor pool (a rarity

in Paris), wine cellars in the suites, an inner courtyard with lush greenery echoing the landscaped entrance. At La Réserve Paris – Hotel and Spa, you experience the quintessence of Parisian chic in the Belle Époque. An address that truly reflects 19th century Parisian elegance, La Réserve Paris offers the chic, refined atmosphere of an urban mansion whose discretion is equalled only by the seductive appeal it exudes.

This February 14th, indulge yourself with an evening of romance and elegance. La Réserve Paris is offering: a complimentary upgrade, a romantic welcome VIP in your room or suite, two glasses of Champagne, dinner for two at Le Gabriel Michelin starred restaurant (excluding drinks), two cocktails at the Bar, free access to the pool and hammam and American breakfast served in your room or at the restaurant.

*Rooms priced from \$2,050 per night including dinner at Le Gabriel Michelin starred restaurant. Offer valid for any stay from February 14th to February 15th 2018. For terms more information visit [www.lareserve-paris.com](http://www.lareserve-paris.com)*

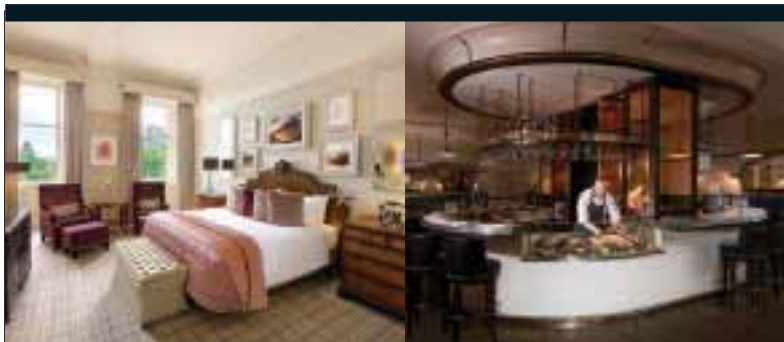




### CONRAD DUBLIN IRELAND

If you are looking for a winter destination then look no further than the infectious charm and warm hospitality of Ireland's capital, at the award-winning Conrad Dublin. Located in the heart of the city, opposite St Stephen's Green and the National Concert Hall, the hotel is the perfect location to explore Dublin's rich literary culture and heritage. Take a voyage of discovery at Lemuel's, relax and enjoy a meal in Alfie Byrne's or take a seat in the stylish surroundings of The

Coburg and experience a true brasserie. The hotel's state-of-the-art fitness centre is equipped with cardio machines and weights, and the jogging routes around the picturesque St Stephen's Green are yours to be enjoyed. Make the most of your time at Conrad Dublin with a curated list of experiences. Explore itineraries that reflect a local take on culture, art, food, and adventure at [stayInspired.com](http://stayInspired.com), and enjoy a truly inspired stay. *Rates at Conrad Dublin start from \$300 per room on a B&B basis. [conradhotels3.hilton.com](http://conradhotels3.hilton.com)*



### WALDORF ASTORIA EDINBURGH THE CALEDONIAN

Built over a century ago, the iconic Waldorf Astoria Edinburgh - the Caledonian is located in the heart of Edinburgh's Princes Street, with the majority of rooms offering stunning views over Edinburgh Castle. The hotel.

The historic Caledonian hotel, a former railway station, offers the perfect base from which to explore Scotland's elegant capital; and is within walking distance of Edinburgh Castle, the Royal Mile, Edinburgh International Conference Centre and the Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, as well as such globally renowned events as the Edinburgh Fringe and the Military Tattoo.

The hotel is home to Galvin Brasserie de Luxe, part of the famed Galvin Brothers' empire. This AA Rosette and Michelin Bib Gourmand awarded restaurant fuses the smart casual aesthetic with classical French fare. The large bustling restaurant epitomises French chic with its airy, white-with blue-accent interiors, and a seafood display centrepiece captures your attention as soon as you walk in. The menu features classical French delicacies such as French onion soup, steak tartare, and escargots, plus a gourmet take on that divisive Scottish specialty haggis – served here with crushed swede and carrot, it is delicious. There's an impressive selection of fresh seafood from the raw bar, as well as a grill menu of Scotland's finest steaks and fish. All dishes, whether it's a confit duck leg with braised cabbage, or the Valrhona chocolate tart with salted caramel, while artfully presented in contemporary European fine dining style, are decidedly Scottish in terms of the taste and portion sizes – i.e: excellent flavours coming through from the quality ingredients, and large hearty servings. It's definitely worth visiting if you can live with the patchy service (an area where they seem to have taken their French inclinations to heart the most!). Once you have explored the enchanting streets of Edinburgh, enjoyed fine dining at one of the many restaurants and lounges, take a relaxing French-style beauty treatment at the only Guerlain Spa in the UK, or take a plunge into the 12-metre pool. *Rooms start at \$280 per night [waldorfastoria3.hilton.com](http://waldorfastoria3.hilton.com)*

### AMAN SUMMER PALACE BEIJING

Eat, drink and breathe China's mind-blowing Empirical past at this lavish resort. Built during the Qing dynasty to house dignitaries awaiting an audience with the emperor at the Summer Palace, it still boasts a secret door into this Unesco World Heritage Site. Slip in before the main gates have opened and stroll around Kunming Lake, picturing Empress Cixi and her thousands of servants gliding past on dragon-shaped barges.

The hotel's 51 bedrooms are housed in heritage buildings painted red, the royal hue, built around courtyards shaded by indigenous trees. Inside, expect gabled ceilings with exposed beams, decorative tiles on floors and carved furniture. Bamboo blinds and traditional lamps create an intimate atmosphere that encourages you to lounge on your daybed and nibble the mysterious bean curd sweets left daily on wooden cake stands.

From musicians playing the pi pa (a string instrument) in the gilt-frosted reception to the daily calligraphy demonstrations in the library, a stay at this hotel is a lesson in Chinese culture. This extends to the kitchen, which serves a fine line in Cantonese plates like spicy chicken and crispy pork skin, accompanied by service so attentive you'll feel like an emperor yourself.

A subterranean wellness centre roamed by squads of soft-voiced therapists is a moodily lit study in shiny granite, cool marble and wooden panelling. Don't miss treatments inspired by Chinese medicine such as herbal poultices, daily gym classes at 2pm and a soak in an enormous bathtub infused with essential oils followed by a massage. *Doubles from \$420. [aman.com](http://aman.com)*



# RECIPES

## FEBRUARY

For better-tasting food and your own peace of mind, use sustainably and locally produced ingredients if possible. Eggs should always be free-range.  
1 teaspoon is 5ml; 1 tablespoon is 15ml

### THE PANTRY

PAGES 20-24



#### Individual cherry and almond clafoutis

SERVES 2

- 25g plain flour
- 10g ground almonds
- 1 egg, beaten
- 35g caster sugar
- 135ml whole milk
- 10g butter, melted, plus extra for greasing
- 300g fresh cherries
- 1 tbsp. demerara sugar
- 2 tsp lemon zest
- Flaked almonds, to serve
- Icing sugar, to serve

Sift the flour and ground almonds into a bowl, add a pinch of salt and the caster sugar. Make a well in the centre, crack in the egg and whisk together. Add the milk and melted butter and stir together to make a smooth batter. Cover with cling film and leave to rest in the fridge overnight. Pit the cherries if doing so and add to a bowl with the demerara sugar and lemon zest. Mix to coat and then set aside for an hour or so. Preheat the oven to 200C, gas mark 6. Lightly grease the base of two shallow dishes or one larger baking dish with butter. Stir the rested batter, then pour into the prepared dishes. Add the cherries and their juices. Bake for 12-15 minutes until the mix is golden brown and the centre is set but with a slight wobble to it.

Serve scattered with flaked almond and dusted with icing sugar.



**Balsamic-roasted cherry salad with kale and bresaola and toasted almonds**

SERVES 2

**200g cherries**

- 1 tbsp. soft brown sugar**
- 1 tbsp. balsamic vinegar**
- 4 tbsp. olive oil**
- 1 tbsp. Dijon mustard**
- 1 tbsp. runny honey**

- 1 tbsp white grape vinegar**
- 1 bunch kale, leaves picked and sliced**
- 30g almonds**
- 80g bresaola**
- 100g soft goat's cheese**

Preheat the oven to 180C, gas mark 4. Put the cherries in a bowl, drizzle with the brown sugar, vinegar and 1 tbsp. olive oil and turn to coat. Tip out onto a baking

tray and cook for 15-20 minutes, or until the berries have softened and started to release their juices. Put the mustard, honey and white grape vinegar in a large bowl and stir to combine. Season and gradually whisk in the olive oil. Tip in the kale and mix really well to ensure that each piece is well coated with dressing. Transfer to the fridge and leave for 1-2 hours to soften. Set a dry frying

pan over a medium heat, add the almonds and cook for 1-2 minutes until golden and toasted. Remove from the heat. Tear the bresaola into pieces. To serve, arrange the kale leaves on a large plate or platter. Add the almonds and bresaola and crumble over the goats' cheese.

Top the salad with the roasted cherries, spooning over any juices.



**Five-spice roasted aubergines with labneh, pomegranates and brown rice**

SERVES 4

- 2 aubergines**
- 3 tbsp. olive oil**
- 2 tsp Chinese five-spice (homemade or store-bought)**
- 150g brown basmati rice**
- 200g labneh**
- juice and zest of ¼ lemon**
- ¼ garlic clove, crushed**
- seeds from ½ pomegranate**
- 3 tbsp. pomegranate molasses**
- Salad leaves, to serve**

Slice the aubergines in half lengthways and score the cut surface all over in a crisscross pattern. Preheat the oven to 220C, gas mark 7. Mix 2 tbsps. olive oil and 1 tsp five-spice powder together, then season with salt. Brush the surface of the aubergines with the spiced oil and place cut-side down on a large baking tray. Roast for 25-30 minutes, turning halfway, until slightly charred around the edges and cooked through. Cook the rice according to pack instructions, adding a teaspoon of five-spice powder to the cooking water. Drain and season generously with salt and black pepper. Set aside. Put the labneh in a bowl, add the remaining olive oil, lemon zest and juice and garlic and beat together. Season. Mix the pomegranate seeds and molasses together. Pile the rice onto a serving platter, add the roasted aubergine and top with the pomegranate seeds and salad leaves. Serve the labneh on the side.





### Five-spice malt loaf with sweet mascarpone

SERVES 6-8

**30g sultanas**  
**70g mixed peel**  
**1 tbsp. malt extract**  
**75g butter, softened**  
**2 eggs, beaten**  
**120g self-raising flour**  
**30g soft brown sugar**  
**1 tsp Chinese five-spice**

**(homemade or store-bought)**

**1 tbsp. runny honey**  
**75g glace cherries, quartered**  
**80g mascarpone**  
**2 tbsp. icing sugar**  
**2 tsp orange zest**

Put the sultanas, mixed peel and malt extract in a heatproof bowl. Pour over enough boiling water to cover, stir and leave to soak for 30 minutes. Drain, discarding

the liquid. Preheat the oven to 180C, gas mark 4. Grease a 450g loaf tin and line with baking paper. In a large bowl beat together the butter, eggs, flour, brown sugar, five-spice, honey and a small pinch of salt until smooth. Fold in the soaked fruit and glace cherries and pour into the prepared tin. Transfer to the oven and bake for 35-45 minutes, until a skewer inserted into the

centre comes out clean. Leave to cool in the tin for 10 minutes, then turn out onto a wire rack to cool completely. Meanwhile put the mascarpone, icing sugar and half the orange zest in a bowl and beat together until smooth. Dust with extra orange zest and serve with the five-spice loaf.

# The Hairy Bikers

Known for their good-humoured blend of cookery and travelogue, television presenters Dave Myers and Simon 'Si' King talk to Food and Travel about their own top culinary pit stops

**What sort of food did you eat as a child?** **Dave:** I was raised on honest home cooking: casseroles, hot pots, shepherd's pie. I can still smell mum's scones now. **Si:** My dad was in the Merchant Navy and he'd bring back exotic things from his travels like star anise and lemongrass, which mum would infuse into jellies. It was quite out-there for our little pit village.

**Where did you last go on holiday; what was the food like?** **Dave:** I recently went to St Petersburg and Moscow with my wife. We had a lovely swan's liver pâté at White Rabbit. Cococo in St Petersburg serves great modern Russian food like Siberian cod with dill sauce, barley risotto and beef tartare. **Si:** Italy. The stand-out meal was at Salumeria Roscioli in Rome. It's a gourmet grocery store with a few tables and a top wine list. As soon as you walk in you see about 12 types of charcuterie.

**Where in Britain has the best natural larder?** **Dave:** Cumbria has amazing farmlands which produce Cumberland sausages but it also has the coast, where you can find Morecombe Bay shrimps and salt marsh lamb. **Si:** I would say Northumberland. The oysters and lobster around Lindisfarn are incredible and there are some great specialities like Steve Ramshaw's Kobe beef and Carroll's heritage potatoes.

**What's the best city in the world for restaurants?** **Dave:** Bangkok. I love the seafood at Lord Jim's and Auntie Vie's street-food stall. She does crab omelettes on a coal-fired wok. **Si:** It has to be Sydney. The standard is so high and the food community is so creative. The sushi at Tetsuya's is fabulous and Hartsyard in Newtown serves very innovative and honest plates. You can't beat the bread at Flour and Stone bakery.

**Which chefs have had the biggest influence on you?** **Dave:** Keith Floyd. He made it OK to be a bloke who liked cooking. **Si:** For me, it's Rick Stein. I always refer to his expertise for shellfish.

**What's your favourite ingredient and how do you use it?** **Dave:** Olive oil. It's worth spending money on because it can transform a salad or a meze spread and one bottle lasts a while. **Si:** Salt from the Margaret River in Australia. It has a slight acidity.

**Which restaurants are on your hit list to visit for 2018?** **Dave:** I've got my eye on Osteria Francescana in Modena and The Sportsman in Kent. It's near my house but I can never get a table. **Si:** Fishheads on Byron Bay in Sydney. It's meant to be amazing.

**What do you think will be the biggest food trend in 2018?** **Dave:** I think Mexican will increase in popularity, particularly the regional food from near the Guatemalan border and Mexican-Mediterranean fusion cuisine like you find in California. **Si:** I have to agree with Dave on this one. Mexican with a greater focus on the regional details. Even the flavour of the chillies varies so much depending on where they were grown.

*Jeanne-Alexandrine Louise Pommery*

*Louis Pommery*

*Rosalie Henry Vasnier*

*Charles-Aristide Adelaide*

*Prince Alain de Polignac*

*Victor Lambert*

*Paul-François Nanken*

*Honoré Auguste-Louis*

*Angeline Jeanne*

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